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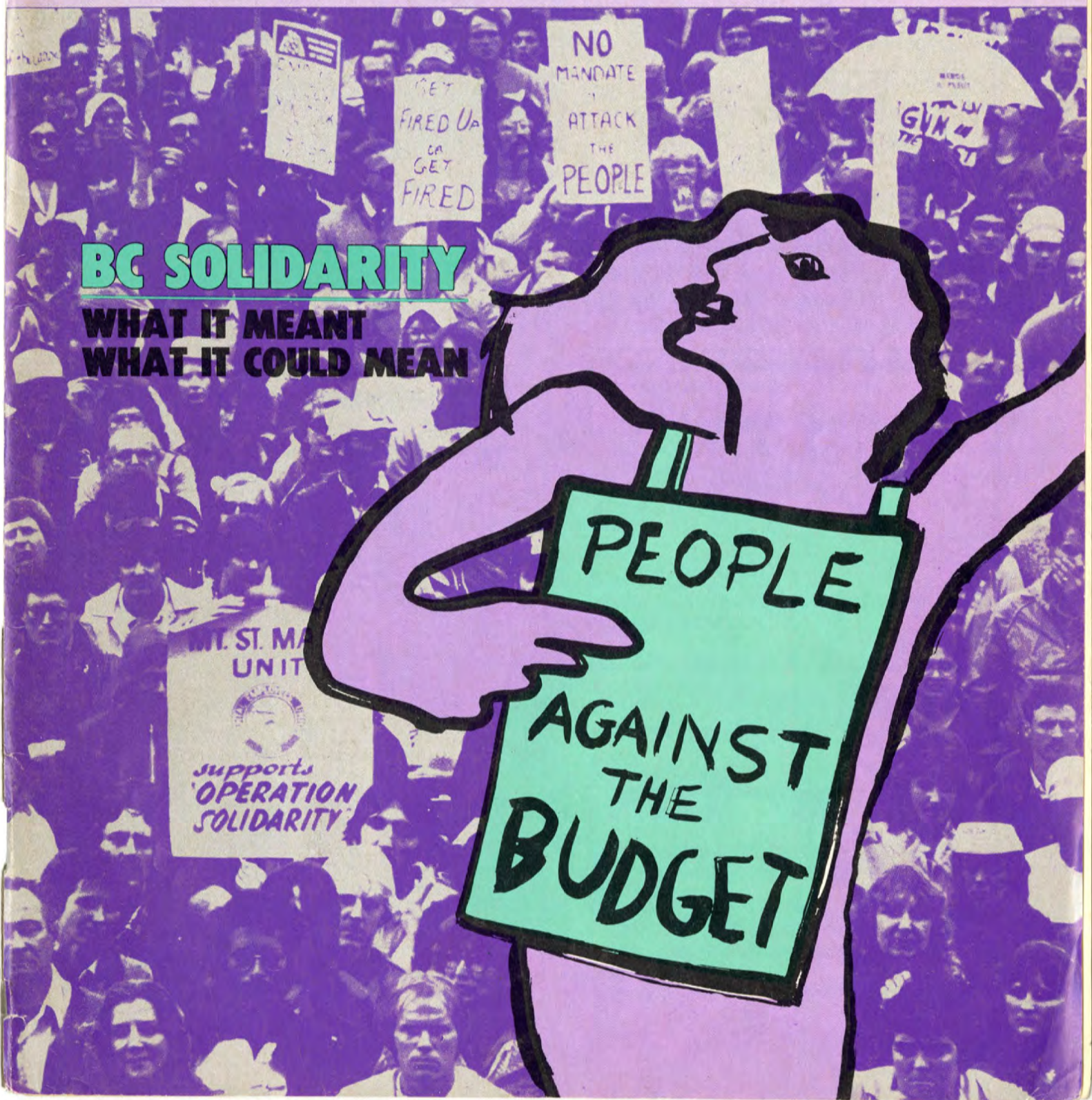
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C.C.

In October 1983 the Ontario Arts Council totally cut its funding to INCITE. The C.C. described this decision as one based on "quality". Well, we all know about the old "quality" argument. As an artist-run publication presenting artists' works, we feel this decision was a statement regarding INCITE's content. It implies the C.C. would rather not fund art which is oriented toward social, political, racial and sexual issues. It suggests that women's concerns, the anti-nuclear movement, gay rights and labour issues don't make for good art. We disagree.

In spite of this major financial crisis, INCITE will continue. But now we need support from our readers immediately. Take out a subscription. Or better still get two, and give one to a friend!

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SPRING 1984 • VOL. VII, NO. 6

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COVER: Two Solidarity posters by Vancouver artists Gordon Gamble and Mary Bechler, collaged and adapted by FUSE.

A Stunning Example

YOUR MAGAZINE PROVIDES A stunning example of why the Left died. It's rare that we find so much pomposity, confusion, and outright hypocrisy between two (glossy) covers. I love the pathetic attachment to a posture of "opposition": from the outside, however, it resembles carping impotence. I don't think you'll set the world on fire.

I love the muddled despair of Joyce Mason's editorial, "Culture and Other Imperialisms". Thanks for admitting that "most of us are dependent on government monies." Glad to hear that some of you are still stoned enough to mistake your rut for a "trench". Wherever you are, you can bet it's under water.

Hope you manage to stay "entrenched" for as long as your grant holds out. May the stagnant pool of your rhetoric never run dry.

"Leftwing stance" aside, you're just another boring phenomenon of Canadian arts bureaucracy, another symptom of decline. You are giving Canadian artists yet another reason to leave home.

Congratulations. Anne McLean,
Montreal

Reinforced Steele

I WOULD LIKE TO POSITIVELY reinforce Lisa Steele for her article "Rock Video Notes" (Part 1), Snakes and Ladders (February 1984). Such a relief to me to read an honest, cold and sober account of rock video as it exists in middle America/Canada.

—Carol Fennel
Montague, P.E.I.

Acknowledgements

IT WAS WITH SOME SURPRISE, nay consternation, that I read Kate Lushington's piece on Pelican Players' *Ancestor Stick*. Actually, what interested me most was Ms. Endres' explanation of the genesis of the work.

I met Ms. Endres in Vancouver at the *Women and Words* conference. She approached me concerning my book, *Primitive Offensive*, which you

reviewed two issues ago. She told me then that she had read the book and found its conception, its search for ancestral answers, interesting. Further, she asked me if I would mind her using the book in a forthcoming production of Pelican Players. I said sure. Next I heard about it was upon my return to Toronto in the fall of '83. My publisher received a poster advertising a play with the title taken from one of the Cantos in *Primitive Offensive*, "ancestor stick". The Canto reads as follows:

ancestor dirt
ancestor snake
ancestor lice
ancestor whip
ancestor fish
ancestor slime
ancestor sea
ancestor stick
ancestor iron
ancestor bush
ancestor ship
ancestor old woman, old bead
let me feel your skin
old muscle, old stick
where are my bells?
my rattles
my condiments
my things
to fill houses and minutes,
the fete is starting
where are my things?
my mixtures
my bones
my decorations
old bead! old tamerind switch!
will you bathe me in oils,
will you tie me in white cloth?
call me by my praise name
sing me Oshun song
against this clamor,
ancestor old woman
send my things after me
one moment old lady
more questions
what happened to the ocean in your
leap
the boatswain, did he scan
the passage's terrible wet face
the navigator, did he blink or steer
the ship
through your screaming night
the captain, did he lash two slaves
to the rigging
for example?
lady, my things

water leaden
my maps, my compass
after all, what is the political
position of stars?
drop your crusted cough
where you want,
my hands make precious things
out of phlegm
ancestor wood
ancestor dog
ancestor knife
ancestor old man
dry stick
moustache
skin and cheekbone
why didn't you remember,
why didn't you remember
the name of your tribe
why didn't you tell me
before you died
old horse
you made the white man
ride you
you shot your leg off for him
old man
the name of our tribe is all i wanted
instead you went
to the swamps and bush
and rice paddies
for the Trading Company
and they buried you in water
crocodile tears!
it would have been better
to remember the name of our tribe
now mosquito dance a ballet
over your grave
the old woman buried with you
wants to leave.

Subsequently, my publisher received a cheque payable to me for the use of the phrase.

Now I don't mind people using my work, sometimes I don't even mind getting the minimal fee for using my work. What I do mind is people not acknowledging that they use my work. When that happens, then I feel ripped off, because I spend a lot of time thinking about and writing my work. So I'm a little pissed off. Not by Ms. Lushington's article, but by Ms. Endres' dishonesty.

The irony is that I don't care too much to be associated with the mystic reductions in Ms. Endres' play. But hell! If you use my work, say so.

In sisterhood,
Dionne Brand, Toronto

LETTERS, Continued on page 244
SPRING 1984

Topical Topics

Suggested Subject for an Editorial

JOYCE MASON

IT IS THE END OF MARCH, AS another FUSE year draws to a close. There have been many things which have moved or outraged me during the last year and even during the last months, and yet I have had some difficulty in finding a focus for this 'winter-will-soon-be-over' editorial.

Here are some of the topics that we have considered: Canada Council is seemingly threatened by proposed changes in legislation regarding the Crown Corporations Act. While the implications of this legislation to "arms length" funding are clear, the end results are, at this point, far from certain.

Incite magazine has had their funding cut — allegedly for reasons of "quality" (see reports section, page 246). This of course brings out some cynicism about the ease and standards with which 'quality' is judged when content and intention are clearly political.

An ACTRA subcommittee released a report and recommendations to the Fraser Committee (federal investigation of pornography and prostitution) and to the Press. The report is a well-intentioned attempt to deal with the misogynist assumptions of pornographic representation as well as with the often coercive and abusive conditions of production. However, rather than suggesting that organising efforts be made — actively soliciting those who act in porn films to form a union and to give voice to their problems, the recommendation is instead that porn production be (effectively) boycotted by ACTRA membership. What, you may ask, is a nice middle class union doing in the porn industry in the first place? Well, the answer is of course that they really aren't. And so the resolution is a way of saying publicly that "We won't do what we

already don't do." In the meantime the majority of women working in the sex industry remain isolated and unorganized.

On the other side of the porn/censorship mess, the feminist community (at least a large portion of it) locked horns with the Censor Board (Ontario) in February over a proposed cut to the film *Born in Flames*. The situation was an important one. Mary Brown (chief censor) publicly admitted that the Censor Board never intended to protect the interest of feminists. The whole thing made it abundantly clear that the protection of "community standards" means upholding the 'status quo'.



Born in Flames

Parachute magazine held a weekend of "art talk" panels in Toronto in mid-March. I, for one, was surprised to hear so many marxist/feminist theoretical assumptions being put forward. While this is in some respects encouraging (i.e. when one brings up a feminist political concern in this context it is no longer dismissed out of hand), there remains numerous problems around the split between theory and practice. The whole set-up of these events is one which encourages oppositions and splits as well as hierarchical

assumptions about the relationships between theory, practice and judgment. In addition to these problems, of course, is the fear that all this may simply be the prelude to the post-socialist/feminist era of criticism.

These were a few of the topics under consideration. But to write an editorial on any one of them, I might feel forced to come to a conclusion. Right now, it seems more timely to be setting agendas. Joyce Mason

Apologies

to Isobel Harry for the following errors in her articles in FUSE, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Nov/Dec 1983): page 149, "champe-noise" was misspelt and the author would have preferred "mock-champagne"; page 156, "And, Eddy Grant, locking into place, says he's..." should have read "And, Eddy Grant, locks in place, says he's..." — in reference to dreadlocks.

to Susan Speigel and Kathryn Firth for a number of errors in the captioning and crediting of a frontispiece for the "Women and Architecture" feature (page 198, FUSE Vol. 7, No. 5, Feb. 1984). Ms. Speigel's name was misspelt and Kathryn Firth's name was unfortunately omitted altogether. The caption, printed on page 199, should have read: "opposite: detail from Entry by S. Speigel and K. Firth (4' x 4' piece), submitted to the "Women's Cultural Building Ideas Competition" sponsored by the Women's Architecture League.

Change of Address

As of May 1st 1984 FUSE offices will be located at: Suite 501, 299 Queen St. W., Toronto, Ontario M5V 1Z9

LETTERS, Continued from page 242

Rapping Knuckles

REQUEST: I HOPE THAT JOYCE Mason will not censor this letter. Dear FUSE: All Editors (Collective) Can you please consider publishing this letter?

Why do your writers rarely expose/attack Canadian imperialism and its pillage of exploited or third world countries? I would like to see some informative work on how Canada fucked up the lives of millions of people in East Timor — how Canada is helping the Honduran army against the revolutionary forces south of its borders. Also how deeply Canada is tied in with South Africa. I don't think you do enough on this level.

Fuse writers don't seem to get much encouragement to expose Canadian imperialism and Canadian racism in any real historical and intellectual sense of the word. Is this an editorial policy?

However, when your writers do jab

at Canadian zionism/racism your editors feel compelled to publish the defeatest [sic] horse-shit letters of sympathizers or apologists for racist countries.

Are you scared that people will call you names if you don't maintain the FUSEY air of objectivity?

CF: Clive Robertson's comments on the intimidation of *Contrast* (p. 184, Nov-Dec '83) by racist fanatics.

What forces you into making the Toronto middle class tremble with politically intense writing such as "Rebellion is not on Joe Jackson's agenda" (p. 194, Recent).

Do you avoid exposés of the Canadian international-monopoly system because the Canada Council will rap your cultural/buffer knuckles? Or are you just culturally nice? Lots of your articles must sound like disco journalism to the Canada Council cultural elite.

In constant struggle for an education on Canada's role in ravaging the third world.

—Julian Samuel
Montreal-Filmmaker

Pondering Porn

I WANT TO MAKE A FEW COMMENTS about the anti-censorship sentiment that abounded on an otherwise wonderful night with Lizzie Borden, Honey and "Born in Flames". I'm speaking of the audience acclaim for Gordon Lawson's film "The Censor".

For those of you who weren't there at the Music Hall on February 24, let me do a brief review of the narrative and style of Lawson's film. Lawson uses plasticine figures in animation to stand for the members of the Ontario Censor Board as they rate a sex film, the participants of which are also plasticine. The Censors watch as the sex players go at it in varying positions. (As they are plasticine, this is obviously not a sexually explicit film.) They watch and comment; they are alarmed and full of "oh dears", "I wouldn't do those things", "my my", etc. while they may be enjoying the spectacle. In the end, the Censors throw darts at a dart board to deter-

LETTERS, Continued on page 248

No Confusion about Censorship The VAG Cancels Sexuality Show

FUTURE HISTORIANS MAY WELL identify the eighties as the decade when sex-as-discourse supplanted sex-as-practice in the popular imagination. Certainly art has always represented sex, however obliquely — but in the past two decades, fueled by the resurgence of the feminist and gay movements, spurred on by the expanded social space of urban capitalism, art has reframed and re-examined sex-as-subject-matter. The current plethora of work dealing with issues of pornography, representation, power and desire are perhaps only the inevitable result of this larger reconstitution of the subject. Suffice to say, the implications of sex are on the art agenda as never before.

Vancouver artists Paul Wong, Jeanette Reinhardt, Gina Daniels and Gary Bourgeois recently collaborated on a related series of media works entitled *Confused/Sexual Views*. A video/audio/photo installation of this work was scheduled to open on February 24 at the newly-reopened Vancouver Art Gallery. The nine-hour video portion consisted of talking-head interviews with twenty-seven friends of the artists discussing their views on sexuality. The curator, Joanne Birnie Danzker, described the show as "provocative, entertaining, humorous and moving."

Three days before the opening, VAG director Luke Rombout, after seeing three of the nine hours, decided to cancel the show, saying it had "...no connection with visual art." He called it "the most difficult decision I have had to make in my professional career." It will also probably be the most disastrous, and perhaps the last. The press coverage, both local and national, was extensive and generally sympathetic to the artists. The *Vancouver Sun*, hardly a bastion of liberalism, published an editorial

stating: "...a signal has been sent out that art must conform with the most straitlaced notions of morality among the gallery's patrons..."

Wong launched an unsuccessful injunction against the gallery to force it to reverse the decision. Later, he said: "We never meant to win, since mandatory injunctions are difficult to win at the best of times." It had its effect in a more important way, serving to mobilize artists in the city against this blatant example of censorship. A public meeting on March 1 drew over 300 visual artists, VAG curators and arts administrators, who launched a comprehensive program of action against the gallery, including:

- 1) A defence fund for Wong, who is suing the gallery for damages to his career, work and reputation;
- 2) An International Artists Boycott of the VAG, until appropriate compensation has been made to the artists, a public apology is issued, and Rombout resigns (Seattle video artist Norrie Sato has already cancelled her upcoming screening as a result);
- 3) A letter campaign and petition demanding the above;

4) An artists' picket of the gallery, which is already in action as of late March.

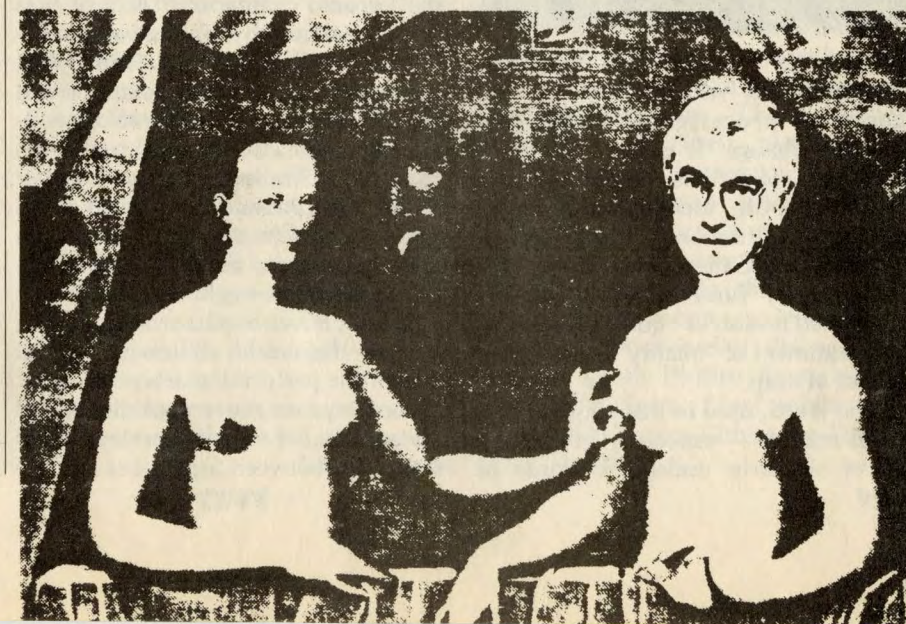
"*Confused* has been damaged by this controversy to the point where I can't show it in Vancouver now," says Wong. "It was designed for a very general art public, and while it was frank, there was consciously no explicit sexual imagery in the piece. The overwhelming support we've received from not just the art community but the general public shows that Vancouver knows a clear case of censorship when they see it — and they don't like it."

The case has also clearly demonstrated the potential for broad and effective organizing by artists against the institutions that supposedly control their livelihood. That the art at stake deals with sex is in some ways no surprise. Given the very vitality of the debates even in the past year around issues of sex (in the Vancouver context, Red Hot Video, the Fraser Commission, etc.), we all recognize at this point that any stifling of expression by the corporate/state sector serves to silence us all.

For more information on the exploits of Rombout and the VAG, see page 276. Letters of protest should be sent to: Board of Directors, Vancouver Art Gallery, 750 Hornby St., Vancouver, B.C. V6C 2H7 with carbon copies to the artists: c/o Video Inn, 261 Powell St., Vancouver, B.C. V6A 1G3.

John Greyson

Tickling Rombout's fancy? Another hard career decision...



courtesy Video Inn

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A Call for Support Against Outright Rejection

INCITE NEEDS YOUR HELP. IF you are against arbitrary cutbacks in the arts and are in support of cultural work, we ask you to write us a letter supporting the continued existence of *Incite* magazine.

Last fall our carpet was cut to a rug, and now the rug has been pulled out from beneath us. In October 1983, without any prior warning, the Ontario Arts Council cut off its funding to *Incite*. Despite this fact we continued to publish and were able to succeed in increasing both the number of contributors to and readers of the magazine. Then, on March 21, 1984, the Canada Council responded to our application for continued funding with outright rejection.



Incite is a visual arts magazine presenting art which is actively engaged in processes of social and political change. It is produced by a collective of artists whose work is respected both locally and internationally. Yet, the only reason put forward by the Canada Council for this rejection of funding is the as-yet-undefined notion of "quality". We feel this argument of "quality" is obviously a load of crap.

The word, used in this way, will remind readers — especially in Ontario — of similarly undefined words of

authority (i.e. the "community standards" of Mary Brown). The arbitrary nature of this cutback operates like censorship. Censorship, it would seem, is not limited to the activities of juries in Don Mills. Without support from both O.A.C. and the C.C. our ability to continue in the development of this important cultural resource is severely threatened.

We are appealing this decision. For that appeal, and to keep going in the meantime, we are calling for support from the arts community. We ask you to send letters of support, critiques, donations and subscription requests. Write to: *Incite*, 379 Adelaide St. W., 3rd Floor, Toronto, Ontario M5V 1S5. And watch for benefits and fundraisers in the near future.

Incite Collective

Politicizing Performers for Peace Picnics

"AS ARTISTS WE RECOGNIZE OUR urgent duty to awaken in ourselves, and to share with our audiences, the creative will to turn the world back from death to life. The creation of P.A.N.D. expresses our conviction that it is possible to end the threat of nuclear war."

Thus ends the Statement of Purpose for the newly-formed peace organization, Performing Artists for Nuclear Disarmament. And thus, we hope, ends the myth of politically apathetic performing artists.

As the grass roots peace movement has grown, and as artists have been looking to find a collective voice in it, the Toronto chapter of P.A.N.D. was formed, almost by spontaneous combustion, in September of 1983. What drew many to it was the fact that it was an international organization consisting of national and/or local chapters, operating collectively rather than by traditional hierarchical structures. Formed in 1982 in Vienna, with Harry Belafonte as its president, its main attraction might be a feeling of connection with performing artists around the world all too rarely felt within the performing arts.

As the peace movement discovered the potential of organized entertainers, the period between September and the

end of the year brought event after event. After the initial euphoric membership concert at the Toronto Free Theatre on September 12th, P.A.N.D. was asked to provide the entertainment for the October 22nd Rally at Queen's Park. In November, responding to Richard Johnston's request for aid in lobbying M.P.P.'s in favour of his private member's bill to declare Ontario a nuclear weapons-free zone, an original piece, with a cast of eighteen, was presented in a committee room at Queen's Park. And most recently, a high profile fundraiser at the St. Lawrence Centre on December 4th, headlined by Belafonte, provided the funds so that another will not be needed for some time to come.

The year-end brought a feeling of need for re-evaluation. Who are we trying to reach? How do we avoid the temptation of preaching to the converted? How do we run our own affairs, efficiently yet collectively? How to get more and more and more members, from all the disciplines of the performing arts and their support mechanisms, and thus have greater and greater political clout? And, perhaps most importantly, what about our own education, and its relation to our everyday personal and professional lives?

From a modest beginning based on the concerted efforts of a few individuals, P.A.N.D. has grown to a membership of close to five hundred, and we believe we have just scratched the surface. A lot of the original impetus came from the theatre sector, and of these the majority were actors. Dancers, musicians, publicists, technicians, performance artists, designers, film artists and many others still need recruiting.

P.A.N.D. wants to encourage as much artistic activity as possible on the issue of disarmament in all its specific and universal ramifications, both within and outside of the organization. At the same time, we are in the process of developing what we have dubbed a "generic show" called *Piece on Peace* (working title). This would be a flexible entertainment that could be offered to peace and community groups, labour organizations, and the educational system on a moment's notice. Other projects may include a day-long picnic in the parks

this summer, with environmental entertainment.

It has been hard for some performing artists, previously "apolitical", to come to terms with the fact that peace is not a "motherhood" issue, but a political one. We have had frequent speakers at our meetings, ranging from a physicist dealing with the nature of nuclear technology and strategy, to a journalist recounting his experiences during a visit to Grenada immediately after the American invasion. This self-educating process has been invaluable. It has helped put into context the political factors involved in global suicide. There is method in their madness. Although many members joined the group out of a generalized feeling of urgency and impending doom, a political analysis of world affairs is beginning to emerge. On November 18, a group from P.A.N.D. took part in the civil disobedience action at the Litton plant. Their trial was set for February (see update).

And so the struggle to exercise the creative will continues. Again, from P.A.N.D.'s Statement of Purpose:

"P.A.N.D. rejects the gigantic failure of will and imagination that has resulted in nuclear terrorism directed against citizens of the world. We call upon governments to reject social-economic policies that result in human deprivation and irreparable environmental loss, and to redirect to human needs the vast resources now being consumed by instruments of destruction. We declare our shared intention to help forge a culture that awakens human potential, celebrates life, and empowers people everywhere to take a hand in their own destiny."

P.A.N.D. Toronto holds weekly meetings every Monday at eight o'clock at the Toronto Free Theatre at 26 Berkeley Street, Toronto. For further information about Performing Artists for Nuclear Disarmament and its activities, call (416) 364-5917.

Richard Greenblatt

Y-RT

POSTERS AND FLYERS HAVE BEEN distributed throughout the city in support of the 'Toronto 127' — those arrested during Remembrance Week peace demonstrations. The posters were done by Y-RT, an artists' collec-

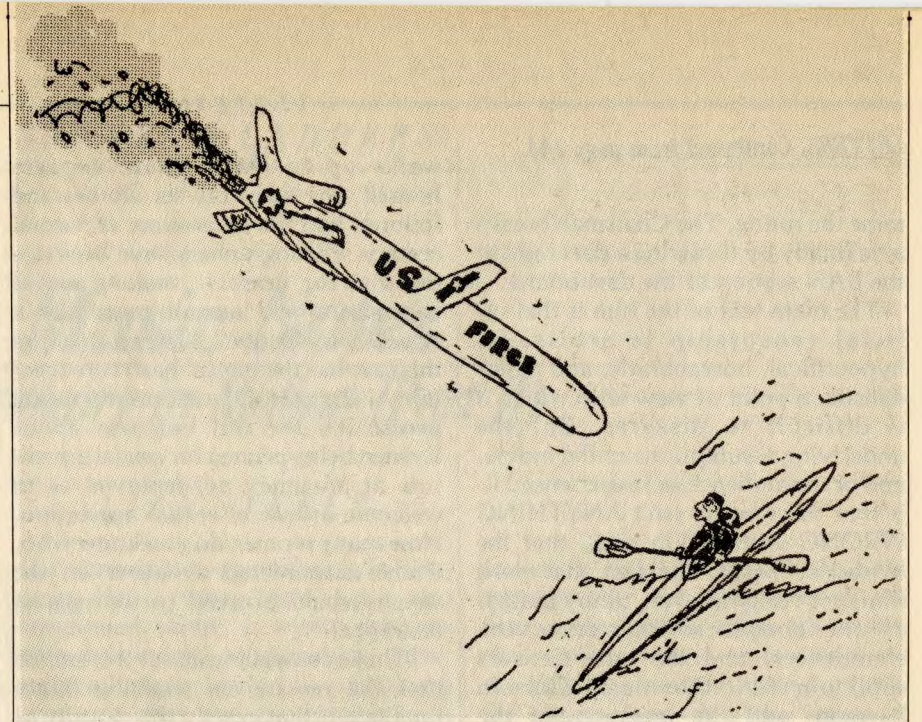


Illustration by Chris Reed from YRT's Peace Calendar

tive which works as part of the Cruise Missile Conversion Project — a Toronto-based group seeking the conversion of Litton, makers of the guidance system for the cruise, to peaceful production.

As artists they are concerned with visually communicating effectively to a wide audience to incite involvement, awareness and change. The group has been active for the past two years and use a variety of media — posters, banners, performance. In 1983, their work, in conjunction with marches, rallies and demonstrations included: April 22nd, an allegorical performance with 14-foot puppets; August 6th and 9th, 12-foot banners commemorating Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings; October 22nd, large 'flip' story-board images on four moving frames.

Viewed historically, they can be linked with other visual artists and movements involved in social change/conscience/protest, such as Kollwitz, Grosz, Beuys or Mexican and Central and South American muralists and Russian constructivists. The context of their work on the streets questions the traditional gallery system of art and as artists they see their role as questioning our present society — specifically, the nuclearism indicative of an hierarchical, globally polarized, military-oppressive society.

Upcoming projects include an April 14th benefit at the Rivoli in Toronto.

Sandra Gregson

Update

TRIALS FOR THOSE ARRESTED during Remembrance Week demonstrations at Litton Industries, November 1983, have been underway during February and March. To date (March 8, 1984) rulings have been set for 64 of the 127 people arrested and one charge was dismissed on a technicality. The 64 were each fined \$75 and 11 of them have also been put on a year's probation due to their history of civil disobedience and refusal to promise not to participate in similar actions in the future.

Those arrested were charged with trespassing. The protesters argued their legal right to trespass at Litton on the premise that it was trespassing with the intent to protect: the same way that entering a burning building to save a person is a protective and necessary gesture. The protesters brought in, at their own expense, several expert witnesses, including Phillip Berrigan and Setsuko Thurlow, a Hiroshima survivor. Many witnesses were denied the opportunity to speak; the judge ruled that their testimony was irrelevant.

PAND organized a defense fund benefit (with Phillip Berrigan and music by *Sweet Lips*) which took place on February 12th at the Toronto Free Theatre.

—S.G.

mine the rating. The Chairman breaks a tie finally by throwing a dart right at the BAN section of the dart board.

The main text of the film is that official censorship is arbitrary, hypocritical, bureaucratic, and paternalistic, a point of view with which it is difficult to disagree. But the underlying assumptions of the movie, and of the audience as I experienced it, is that there really isn't ANYTHING WRONG with a skin flick, that the hypocrisy lies in the fact that porn films are really groovy, funny in fact, as the couple swings from the chandeliers, and that the Censors spoil our fun. Obviously Gordon Lawson, and the members of the audience who giggled throughout the sexual romp, do not have the slightest idea what is and what goes into making a pornographic film.

Let's be clear here. Lawson isn't pretending that the Censor is hacking away at great art. No Jane Fonda and a paraplegic John Voight in this one, no Tin Drum references or Pretty Baby allusions. This was straight-ahead porn, with the typical pornographic conventions, the kind of materials that are often glossed as "non-violent" hard core pornography. Those of you who think that Lawson is referring to that "mutual erotica" we talk so much about (and never see) must have missed the female partner's black underwear, those standard trappings of female sexual slavery and the obnoxious reference to the dog in the scenario as in the Censor's exclamation, "Oh no, a dog".

The audience thought this was quite amusing. Do Lawson and the other chortlers know that Linda Lovelace fucked a dog for a pornographic film with a gun at her head. Ask yourselves this: do you really believe that women actually *choose* to fuck dogs so that boys can film the event and make money out of it? The truth about Linda Lovelace is one of countless nasty tidbits that go by the wayside as the "regular" world forgets that you can't have a pornographic film without a good deal of rape, coercion, pimping and sexual slavery.

I was particularly taken by Lawson's mythmaking about sexual encounters and how they begin: Remember? Man

walks up to the woman, exposes himself, she takes off her clothes and follows him for a session of sexual ecstasy. Pornographers have been doing that for years — making sexual harassment and assault seem like a sweet "proposition". The woman in this case has the typical hard core reaction — she grasps the nearest wavering penis. It's the old business about women being primed for sexual adventure at all times, so depraved as to welcome an act of sexual aggression. How many women do you know who, if she encountered a flasher on the street, would proceed to the nearest bedroom?

What's compelling about this stuff is that the researchers studying it are finding out that exactly this posture of pornographers causes viewers to trivialize rape. Prolonged exposure to these myths makes "normal" men believe that women really ask for it. And to the women who didn't see it for what it was in "The Censor", THIS MEANS YOU TOO.

It is precisely because of this sex stereotyping in pornography and my own consciousness of what happens to women who make x-rated films, that I have begun to view pornography as a *practice* of sex discrimination and not an *idea* or even speech. In other words, I've realized that the pornographer's speech is, at some time, another woman's life. With this perspective I'm working on developing legislation similar to initiatives taken by Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon in the U.S. that will allow women to sue pornographers for damages if they have been coerced into sex acts in the making of pornography or if they are forced by consumers to replicate sex acts in pornographic materials (more in a future issue of *Broadside*). This kind of litigation removes cops and censors — all the machinations of the state authority — from the scene and empowers the victims to redress the damages done to us through pornography.

I prefer this approach to prior censorship. But that does not mean that I have become complacent about what pornography, Gordon Lawson style, is and does. This is not a letter about process. As a member of the *Broadside* collective (which sponsored the films at the Music Hall with FUSE) on leave,

I was made aware that "The Censor" would be shown with "Born in Flames". It's just that I last saw "The Censor" many years ago before I had begun my own painful exploration of the subject of pornography. Now I feel like I have a different pair of eyes. I wish people in that audience had had the same eyes. They would have understood that Gordon Lawson may be right on track about the dangers of censorship, but he's almost as dangerous as the pornographer when it comes to the representation of sexuality.

—Susan G. Cole, Toronto

EDITORIAL RESPONSE — I must take issue with Ms. Cole's interpretation of *The Censor*. The "typical pornographic conventions" trotted out in the film are *elements* and must be read in context. Though I cannot provide a re-interpretation of *The Censor* in this space, I find that the above letter completely denies an understanding of filmic self-consciousness, parody or the conventions of satire.

Those who laughed at the 'plasticization' of pornographic conventions (and of the conventions of censorship) did not do so because they "do not have the slightest idea what is and what goes into making a pornographic film". This presumption is astounding! The audience was more likely laughing at the conventions of pornography and at the genuine humour of seeing often-threatened things represented in a ridiculous manner.

It seems to me that what has happened here is a conflation of issues and images, leading to a style of 'logic' which is itself a distorted fetishization — where *symbols* become a stimulus, for rage, whether or not the context is appropriate, i.e.:

In porn, women are exploited.

In porn, women sometimes wear black underwear.

therefore, representing a woman in black underwear in a spoof of porn and censorship *condones* the exploitation of women.

This 'reductive reasoning' could itself have a certain kind of humour but in this case I am dismayed by both the attitude and the effect.

Joyce Mason
SPRING 1984

Music Notes

Iconolatry in Motion (Part II)

LISA STEELE

BEFORE PROCEEDING WITH THE second half of music video, I would like to clarify exactly why I ended up abandoning my original intention of examining this material in terms of the *image of women*. In view of what I have written in Part I of this survey (FUSE, Vol. 7, No. 5), it's obvious that I found no "image" of women in music video. Instead there are multiple representations, images and symbols of women as individuals and as a group.

In the tapes which presented a negative image of women, these seldom occur singly, but are more often than not layered. Thus a stereotypical role (housewife, call girl, witch, etc.) will be assigned to a woman or women appearing within a tape and these rigid gender-assigned characters can then be bracketed visually with trite object symbols (a rose, a dagger, chains, etc.) and equally blatant symbolic gestures (doors which open on empty rooms, a wedding ring cutting into a bride's finger, or, that perennial favorite, the explosion). In terms of the image of women presented, the resulting visual package can either look like a well-cooked stew or unsorted laundry depending upon the expertise of the editor and the intended 'message' the work is meant to convey.

The previously mentioned tapes by Dr. Hook (*Baby Makes Her Blue Jeans Talk*) and Trio (*Da Da Da*) fall into the "stew" classification, presenting very coherent visual and vocal statements about women — the former saying unequivocally that women's bodies exist simply to be admired by men; the latter saying plainly that independence can be a dangerous thing for a woman by constructing a scenario within which a waitress who has rejected sex-

ual harassment is murdered. In contrast, Helix' *Heavy Metal Love*, also mentioned before, is within the "unsorted laundry" classification. Here, contradictory images — a strong woman's body and another in chains — are unself-consciously juxtaposed in a rush of attraction/revulsion, domination/submission, resulting in a classically ambivalent view of women by men. (Curiously, heavy metal

FEMINISM IN THE MEDIA

music video, which was so overtly over-loaded with imagery of constriction and release in regards to women, seemed, for me, less of a problem than other more confused tapes. This may be precisely *because* of the ambivalence which permitted the viewer a much less 'authoritative' view of this-is-woman than many of the new wave bands.)

On the other hand, even the tapes which were, to my mind, a more positive depiction of women, didn't

John Scott



present a single image. What links these is the fact that women are *instrumental* within them; it's usually their music, their voice and the resulting tape becomes their story. But the stories, and thus the image of women, are varied in terms of age and class and in relation to dominant forms of imagery. So while the tapes by Donna Summer, Pat Benatar and Sheena Easton (discussed in Part I) all provide positive depictions of women, they accomplish this in different ways: by showing the working conditions of underpaid female workers; by showing young women seeking independence and coming to rely on each other for support as a consequence; and finally by showing a direct confrontation between a woman and society's 'monsters' within which the woman triumphs.

But before I continue, I should say that I did not find *all* tapes by women musicians positive in their depiction of the roles of women. Some seemed decidedly retrogressive. In Stevie Nicks' *If Anyone Falls*, for example, she seems caught in a romantic novel of her own doing, flapping around in fluffy dresses, looking pale and awkwardly executing a pas de deux with her very own soft-focus dream lover. It's a work of unassuming vacuity, complete with a shot of Stevie watching herself on a screen at one point — not so much a comment on the media's role in the creation of self-image, as a reinforcement of the old adage of woman-as-eternal-narcissist. She gives us no reason to believe differently. And then of course, there's Olivia Newton-John, whose tapes are so successful in their presentation of her as a woman so doggone happy about being born in the era of the Cosmo girl that it makes my teeth hurt. Newton-John's tapes (I saw three) give

all the indications that there's nothing — including skewed power relations between genders — that a little gal with a strong jaw, a big voice and a fab wardrobe can't cure in four minutes flat. It's usually accomplished through role-reversal. Her confidence is less inspiring than nauseating, as it appears to be based squarely in Madison Avenue-type promotion campaign strategies. Which is to say that the energy of Newton-John's persona is brittle and hard sell, isolating her in the person-as-product form which advanced capitalism has reserved for promoting the cult of the individual. And advanced capitalism being what it is, Olivia Newton-John can be said to 'succeed' — at least in terms of the sale of herself.

But on to the second part of my random survey of music video. To reiterate, I wrote comments on content and form immediately after viewing over 80 individual music videotapes and then defined nine categories for analysis. In the first part of this survey I covered:

- 1) recession imagery
- 2) music is revolution
- 3) domestic relations, and
- 4) power of women
- This time I will examine:
- 5) post-apocalypse imagery
- 6) older women
- 7) surveillance
- 8) no women
- 9) women as props

To clarify the conditions of this survey, I would like to note that I viewed all these tapes on broadcast television, thus I saw many of them only once, and that my survey was conducted in the last few weeks of 1983, so many of the tapes which I am referring to have, of course, disappeared from the marketplace which is music video.

Post-Apocalypse Imagery

I classified 9 tapes in this category based on a preponderance of imagery which refers to what it will be like 'afterwards'. But, interestingly, the views presented don't really challenge the rush to annihilation, but rather pose themselves (that is, the band) as somehow survivors, coming out, at times quite literally, on top of life after the bomb.

Billy Idol's *Dancin' With Myself*, which was done by *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* director Tobe Hooper, features a huge group of ragged, grubby people crawling up a steep embankment. The earth is steaming and looks dangerous; but things do get worse as this group is suddenly subjected to an enormous, convulsive electric shock and ends up in a disturbing pile of bodies reminiscent of images of the holocaust. However, this story goes, all is not lost, as this 'civilization' is resurrected by none other than the singer, who urges these latter-day cockroaches to dance on the dusty rooftops of the destroyed world. Emerging from this tape is a view of humanity which is composed primarily of followers, presented visually as 'low life' — they're crawling — capable of being redeemed not by their own collective action but instead by a Leader. And who better to be this Leader than a (you guessed it) Lead Singer. What we have here is perhaps an adequate analogy for making it in the world of pop music, but it is a more than unfortunate view of how to survive as a human being; a view which is seriously out of touch with how most adults live their lives on a day to day level and one which corresponds more to pre- and mid-adolescent fantasy projections (vicarious triumph of the individual through identification with sports figures and other heroes which is acted out through play and fighting). But no-one ever said rock video was for adults. Now I haven't told you about the other predominant image in this tape, which is intercut with all of this things-are-bad-they-get-worse-but-finally-He-comes imagery. It is the silhouetted figure of a woman in chains straining against her bonds. Here, I confess, my analysis fails me. I don't know what this signifies. When I'm kind and think nice thoughts, I believe that this figure could represent Mother Earth, but when I remember that Mr. Idol himself is all the while gnashing his teeth over the lyrics 'I've been with every type of girl...', I realize that this poor soul could be an unfortunate 'ex' who has fallen out of favour in a big way. In any case, this woman's exact relationship to the final destruction of the planet eludes me, but what disturbs me is her presence in the picture at all. Ambivalence here crosses over into

license.

Less ambivalent but infinitely more pretentious is *Synchronicity 2* by The Police. Here the band opens the tape playing their tune on top of a big heap of trash, their clothes in tatters. Soon they are atop a builder's scaffold; cut to the camera cruising over water with an imminent electrical storm brewing on the horizon; cut to scene of a ferocious wind blowing papers in a fiercely whirling funnel; cut to guitars being destroyed à la The Who; cut to a ruined mess of a former society lying in a heap. The lyrics: "Another working day has ended, another rush hour to face...suicide our race..." These guys are so fed up, they would gladly push the button it seems. The only curiosity here is the exclusion of any other human forms from the action. The result is a cruel and autocratic vision of social change in the form of 'a big wind gonna blow through this house'.

While not so sinister, *Allies* by the female duo Heart personalizes The Big Bang with less than satisfactory results. The tape opens in a timeless, opulent white interior, sort of upper west side New York City. They sing "Allies in a world of too much choice... I only hear your voice...allies with our backs against the wall...I will answer when you call..." While outside their overlooking-it-all picture window, the city skyline explodes. It is, the viewer assumes, wartime. Sure enough, the next shots show us people huddled together in bomb shelters. It's mostly women and children. Two men enter. Not until one of them smiles, is his status as "ally" confirmed. The tape ends with his hand reaching down and being grasped by a child's hand. Voilà! The Creation. Assuming that this tape was not financed by the pro-NATO crew, I would guess that they just got carried away with a literal translation of the word "ally". But its sentiment cuddles a bit too close to wartime newsreels for my taste and is compounded by an "I'm just sittin' around waiting for the right guy" attitude. In the face of the exploding world which is present in this tape, the mythology of redemption and rescue places the women protagonists (the singers) in almost as passive a position as the creepers in Billy Idol's *Dancin' With Myself*. The only difference is that the women in Heart can choose who to

follow; in other words, make a 'good marriage'. This is, one must remember, a choice available within certain classes. *Allies* underscores this class alliance in the choice of a household setting which is very, very rich.

In none of the tapes which presented post-apocalypse imagery was there any sense of possible human intervention in the process of destruction. It was simply taken to be inevitable. The responses however were different. Heart seems to be more personal, saying that one could if one were lucky make the right moves and be rescued by Mr. Right. It's really just a Harlequin romance up-dated (or post-dated perhaps). Billy Idol seems to posit the triumph of a regressive demigod in the face of global annihilation. The Police just say fuck it, it's not worth the trouble. I found it disturbing that in this sampling of tapes available for regular viewing by young North Americans on the eve of 1984, no one seemed to be suggesting that we fight back. If the peace movement wants to mobilize the youth maybe they should finance some anti-nuke tapes....

Older Women

I placed 10 tapes in this category because they included at least some references, usually visual, to women who are older than rock and roll's primary audience. Some of the tapes included these visual references in order to highlight this age difference. In doing so, they actively reinforced the stereotype of older-women-equals-unattractive-woman, and in a society which often measures the 'value' of women strictly in terms of their visual appeal, it's little wonder that as women age they find themselves in positions of little influence or power within this culture as a whole. So I can't say it was a surprise to see this representation within music video.

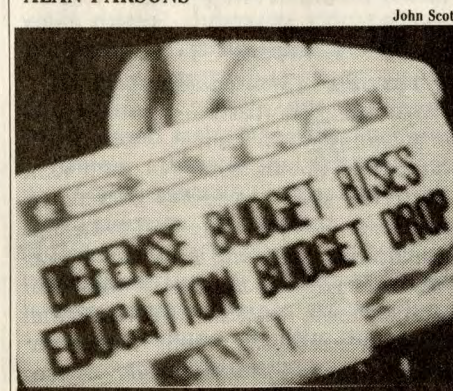
Michael Jackson's *Billy Jean*, for example, features a middle-aged woman, her hair done up in geeky plastic rollers, acting the snoop by spying out of her window on him as he goes up a fire escape and then rushing to her telephone. Given the 'plot' of the lyrics — "Billy Jean is not my lover...and the kid is not my son..." — which seems to be Jackson's attempt to exonerate himself in a paternity suit, one can

assume that this woman is meant to represent either an actual person or that she functions as the Forces of Gossip within the community at large. Either way, physically she's a stereotype of the big-mouthed, nosey meddler and wholly unappealing.

Bob Dylan's *A Sweetheart Like You* features an equally stereotypical older woman character. The setting for this tape is a club after hours; the band is playing all alone except for a female cleaner who is doing her char work. She pauses in her duties, leans on her mop handle and observes the band as



ALAN PARSONS



AUTHORITY SONG / JOHN COUGAR

Dylan rasps the lyrics. The editing suggests that he is crooning to this cleaning woman as it cuts between the band and her tired, lined face, reflective and sentimentally engrossed. The irony of this woman's position — front row centre, enjoying a personal concert from Mr. Dylan, a seat which would cost her a week's wages on the open market — is odd and seems to suggest an attitude of 'music for the masses'. But the lyrics are odder: "A woman like you should be at home taking care of someone who won't abuse you... what's a sweetheart like you doin' in a

dump like this." These would seem to suggest that this woman works because she is beaten at home. Now while many women are beaten by their husbands, most work because they need the money. If she's in a "dump like this" it's because that's the only job available to her and all the sweet talk in the world won't improve her economic circumstances. Furthermore, Dylan seems to be speaking quite directly against women working; his lyrics upholding the fundamental patriarchal assertion that a woman's place is in the home. The only progressive part being that the home should be free of abuse.

But there's another element in this tape: the presence of a young woman with long blond hair who plays lead guitar in the band while the previous scenario is being enacted. Watching this tape the first time, I assumed as many viewers must have, that this woman is indeed playing the music we are hearing. Now since Dylan doesn't seem to be addressing this woman in his lyrics — she doesn't seem to be the "sweetheart" he's talking to — I interpreted her as a living example of the more positive role models which are available to younger women than those which were there for the cleaning woman when she was young. That is, younger women today can make decisions — such as becoming a musician — which allow them more freedom, including freedom from the oppression of the home. Now, it turns out that I was being overly optimistic about Dylan's intentions. It seems that the young woman is just a prop. She's not the lead guitarist in this recording (Mick Taylor and Mark Knopfer are the guitarists credited on the album). So this part of the tape is a fraud. If Dylan's really interested in affirmative action within the music industry he could have at least hired a woman to play the music instead of just using the image of a woman.

If Dylan sentimentalizes and talks down to the older woman in his tape, The Boys Brigade go even further in *The Passion of Love*, offering up a trio of elderly women as buffoons and foils for The Boys. This trio appears throughout the tape dressed up for a formal occasion in stiff brocade dresses and matronly little hats. They're made to look so downright silly that when they appear to be playing the music,

we know it's a joke, that they're miming. The setting for this tape is a classically kitschy 'ethnic' living room where the women fit in but The Boys look decidedly uncomfortable. One sequence features these grandmotherly figures getting dolled up with make-up, lipstick and rouge, and then contorting their faces into grotesquely caricatured 'feminine' poses — grinning, oogling, winking and pursing their lips. With no other information to go on than the tape itself, I was left with the nasty impression that viewers are supposed to laugh at these old women and, more disturbing, that we are supposed to 'understand' The Boys' rejection of them as sexual beings. I say this because early in the tape there is a scene where two of the women sit, flanking one of The Boys on the couch and as the camera moves, one of them reaches up and turns out the light; cut to a scene with The Boys lying on a bed together. Coupled with the make-up sequence, these scenes congeal into a statement which is ageist in the extreme, mocking the appearance and actions of elderly women, implying that their use of what these guys would no doubt call "feminine wiles" (make-up, turning out the lights, winking, etc.) is preposterous and just turns them into ugly, contorted creatures whose mere presence somehow acts as a catalyst for The Boys getting together in bed. It's as if they are so unattractive as sex objects that The Boys must turn to each other. This may seem like an extremely negative reading of what many viewers would consider to be a "harmless and fun" tape, but as I tried to analyze the visual content — particularly since the lyrics are exceeding banal and make no direct references to the women presented — the inclusion of the trio of grandmothers seemed gratuitous if not vicious at times.

In contrast there is *300 Pounds of Wonderful Joy* by the blues band Big Twist and the Mellow Fellows (mentioned also in Part I). Here the elderly women could just as easily have been ridiculed as they very properly circulate at the country-club-type tea party which is the setting for this tape. But they aren't. Instead of being wacky old bags, they become energetic participants, as their staid get-together is crashed by Big Twist et al. and they end up dancing with the band

members. The key difference would seem to me to be the fact that Big Twist himself and his band members are not pretty, young boys. They are mostly middle-aged, mostly over-weight men; thus the elderly women don't stand out in high relief as 'The Other' in contrast. Their presence in this tape is more as people than as symbols. And while nothing much happens in the course of this piece, *300 Pounds of Wonderful Joy* is unusual in that it visually contradicts the stereotype of both elderly women and heavy-set men, as it celebrates their physicality rather than ignoring or denigrating it.

The last tape I will discuss in this category may seem strange at first. It is Olivia Newton-John's *Landslide*. I included it not because there is any visual imagery of older women, but because Newton-John presents herself here in romantic relation to a very young man. She is present in this tape as a space woman, an executive complete with three-piece suit, a sorceress and a romantic heroine, finally banishing her apparently teenaged male sex-object to a cage in the end. Throughout, she wields her dominant position — older, richer, more powerful — with glitzy aggression, illustrating the mockery which much of the mass media has made of the phrase "a liberated woman" within the last decade. The fact that this tape features a woman in the superior position does little in my mind to redeem the overwhelming quality of lusting after what would have been called "jail bait" had it been produced by a man. Gender reversal does not mitigate power inequality within personal relationships.

I should say at this point that I did not define a category of imagery which referred specifically to older men, but I could just as easily have done this and I think it would have yielded just as negative a reading as the analysis which I have done of the image of older women. I recall that there was the odd middle-aged male presented as occupying a position of power (particularly Paul Kastner's *Planet Earth* which featured a classic 'slimy capitalist' hovering over a computer terminal which was displaying a read-out of profits), but this was very infrequent and the predominant image of older men was as winos, rubbies, and derelicts. But music video like pop

music itself is made for the youth of our culture and youth are fond of looking at each other. This Peter Panism, however, only serves to underscore the political impotence of most current pop music. Without clearer analyses of power relations — political, social and personal — pop music will never be the force for social change that it (cyclically) threatens to be and will remain as a form of 'entertainment' and thus a pressure valve for the discontent of the young.

Surveillance

I included 9 tapes in this category because they contained images of voyeurism, watching and being watched within them. In some the activity is presented as very normal: Stevie Nicks' *If Anyone Falls*, has a scene of Nicks watching herself on television in perfect confluence with the view of woman as eternal narcissist; Joe Jackson's *Into The Night* utilizes Hitchcock's Rear Window camera style to spy on other apartments in his building; and Trio's *Da Da Da* locates a very violent scene — the death of a waitress — on a television set in the pub where her murder has just occurred. I would group these pieces together because they all seem to have internalized surveillance, either self or societal, and are simply re-presenting images of this activity through the technique of the tape. It's almost as if surveillance and voyeurism are just another available form, like the close-up or medium shot, for recording information visually. Presented as they are with no reflection or analysis, the act of surveillance is emptied of meaning and enters the realm of that's-the-way-things-really-are. This inordinately dumb approach denies the power relations involved in what is essentially a terrorizing act for those who are the subject of surveillance.

The Rolling Stones aren't dumb when they address this issue in *Under Cover of the Night*, but they do manage to embed their seemingly endless opinions about female sexuality within this tape which is ostensibly about violence as it is presented by the news media. It opens with a young couple in their late teens making out on the couch at home; the tv is on. Gradually, the young woman becomes

engrossed in the images of violence which are invading her home. She pulls herself out of her embrace with her boyfriend and watches intently as some vaguely "South American" scenario unfolds on tv, including the murder of what appears to be a political prisoner by the authorities. The disturbing part about this tape is its insistence on the woman's interest in the violence. And given her preceding activity — which would seem to be imminently sexual — her withdrawal into the media violence relates the message of this tape not to its chic 'political' veneer but to the consistent theme of the Rolling Stones' songs: that women like violence at least as much if not more than they like sex. And *The Whip Comes Down*, *Black and Blue*, *Under My Thumb* are some of the many variations offered by the Stones over the years on this theme.

The Police, on the other hand, present their young female audience with a more direct statement. *Every Breath You Take* (which just won a Grammy for something) is clearly a warning. The lyrics focus on woman as object of intense surveillance: "every breath you take, every vow you break, every move you make...I'll be watching you...Can't you see you belong to me..." It's all so simple. This textual message is rounded out nicely with shots of a window washer (Peeping Tom? paid informant?) completing the caution to women: watch your step.

The violence here is all implied (what will happen if he does catch her and what's she been doing anyway?) and are surrounded visually with the predominant images of the starkly romantic faces of the band and Sting as he sings, photographed in black and white. Thus male domination as a replacement for equality within love relationships is embodied by the pop star's image and the act of surveillance is made palatable by equating it with love. As the fans 'love' their idols, so should women 'love' their men. Deuteronomy couldn't have said it better.

The final tape which I'll discuss within the category of surveillance accepts the act to an even greater degree. Olivia Newton-John's *Twist of Fate* goes so far into 1984isms as to positively glamourize what should be horrifying events. This tape is set in a high-tech, futuristic courtroom. Here,



ROCK IT HERBIE HANCOCK

John Scott



ADVENTURES IN SUCCESS

Newton-John pleads her case (which is undefined) before a stern (male) judge and a room full of on-lookers. As she sings — "It's got to be a strange twist of fate...love is what we found the second time around..." images of herself and her male 'co-respondent' (John Travolta) are subjected to a myriad of special effects. Their faces are frozen mid-action, turned into photographs and end up in the hands of the on-lookers as 'evidence'. (Here this group would seem to function as a kind of jury.) Images of their love-making are similarly treated, as intrusive cameras enter through windows, 'steal' pictures and then these images of intimate activity surface within this weird courtroom. But Newton-John remains unperturbed by this overwhelming invasion of her privacy, plowing through her up-tempo lyrics seemingly unaffected by the injustice of her surroundings. The lack of commentary is stunning. The tape finishes with a reunion (who knows why they were estranged in the first place) between Newton-John and Travolta on the courthouse steps. And this image is also frozen into a smiling photograph — a kind of all's-well-that-ends-well validation of the state's power to intrude into private life.

This category as a whole was more depressing than any of the others to me. Only here did technological deter-

minism seem so consistent, did assent to the look of control (through the techniques of surveillance and voyeurism) occur simply because the imagery which resulted was attractive and 'modern'. These tapes go beyond being a-political; they're deeply anti-political in the attitudes which surface in them.

No Women

I established a category for tapes which featured no images of women thinking originally that there would be many. There ended up being only 9 — around 10% of the total. Interestingly, three of these were by The Police. I would hazard the guess that Sting wants no competition visually in his tapes. Also of interest to me was the fact that my admittedly limited random survey contained no tapes where men did not appear.

The only tape in this category which I will discuss is *True* by Spandau Ballet because it seems the only one in this category which is actually about men and thus there's a reason for the absence of women. There is no 'plot' to this tape; it is essentially a performance work by an all-male band which has been heavily edited to produce a constructed narrative which is visual. The band plays and sings within a very large, empty set; the individuals are far from one another within this set. The song is sort of old-fashioned, a love song with a slow tempo and almost sweet lyrics. The cutting together of the band's images as they play their music is accomplished through straight edits as well as special effect wipes and split-screens. The result is the constructed narrative which I referred to: gradually, as one man's face fades or is cut to another, the physical space that separates them in the actual set (which the view sees periodically) is lessened. The musicians come out of isolation into direct relation with one another. It's an elegant visual metaphor for the process of creating music collaboratively. It's also the only tape which I could term erotic in a positive sense (in this case, it was homoerotic — at one point a split screen almost allows two male faces to kiss) and stood in contrast to the many tapes which offered images of the very vexed state of male/female sexual relations.

Women as Props

With this as my final category, it's difficult not to end on a rather sour note. But objectification of women — in the mass media, in advertising, etc. — is a well-researched area. Music video, as a part of mass-circulated imagery, is no different than other such forms. I found that over one-third of the tapes I viewed — 29 in all — presented images of women as objects. I included tapes in this category if the images of women were stereotypes, and remained unchallenged, if their actions or presence were not in some way instrumental, in other words, if they were used as props, much like furniture or other objects on the set. ("We need a waitress now...this calls for a hooker...bring on the bride..." etc.)

Here is a brief catalogue of images of women which were directly presented as a full screen image, not as part of a background or group scene. There were: several women in chains (Billy Idol's *Dancin' With Myself*, Helix' *Heavy Metal Love*, Def Leppard's *Rock of Ages*); several tarty looking women (Ian Hunter's *All The Good Ones Are Taken*, Planet P's *Why Me?*, John and Vengalis' *Friends of Mr. Caine*), several women in bikinis (Duran Duran's *Rio*, Billy Idol's *Dancin' With Myself*, ABC's *Look of Love*), a few on roller skates (Peter Shilling's *Major Tom*, Ian Hunter's *All the Good Ones Are Taken*), some fashion-type models (Human League's *Mirror Man*), a couple of gussied up society dames (Rick Springfield's *Souls*, Joe Jackson's *Into the Night*), a few 'mystery' women (Mike Oldfield's *Midnight Shadows*, Graham Parker's *I'm the One*, Stray Cats' *I Won't Stand In Your Way*) a woman with a baby (Michael Stanley Band's *My Town*), a nun, a violinist, a woman dressed up like a cat

... I'm sure you get the picture. I have listed all these examples of women as props because they appear within the respective tapes as defined roles — socially defined usually, but defined nonetheless — usually for no reason

that is directly connected to the narrative of the visuals or the lyrics. They are presented simply as 'images'. I am of course over-stating the point. Because an image (for instance, of a woman in chains) is loaded with sexual and social implications. It doesn't mean nothing. But it is often used within music video as if it did mean nothing — or anything. That is, it is used like an empty vessel capable of being filled with any viewer's fantasy meaning. The flexibility of the female body, the ability to assume roles which are readily identifiable because of costume, make-up, etc. is astounding.

While it's not surprising that I found almost no images of men as objects in my survey of music video since men are seldom presented in this way in any form of mass media, it does seem remarkable that there were so few images of the male roles which are easily identifiable with power and authority in our society. There were few policemen or soldiers, few businessmen or fathers, few judges. (I found one of each of these in the tapes which I surveyed.) There were no heads of state, members of parliament, heads of corporations, etc. etc. Instead male power and authority were most often located within the band members themselves (if they were male). They would thus appear more as individuals, and shown to be instrumental within the overall content of the tape.

This, to me, represents a serious ideological direction being undertaken by the (primarily male) producers of music video and another example of the de-fusing power of popular music. By allowing the very volatile — and potentially revolutionary — energies of the youth to be split along gender lines with young men being encouraged to identify with the illusory power of the male musician and encouraged to believe that they can 'win' by oppressing women, through objectification, violence, or subtler combinations of these same elements, and young women being told that these gender arrangements are not only 'natural' but somehow sexy, our society can continue to be controlled by those who already hold most of the strings. Records will be sold, profits can rise and no social change will be effected.

Music video, for the most part, eliminates the dissenting voices of women, racial minorities, the unemployed youth, and thus mimics the way in which power reproduces itself within the body politic. The saddest thing is the overt sexualization of this power struggle which is present in many of these mass circulated videotapes, as over and over the male subject subdues the female object, with the men and women 'playing' their respective roles to a T. Most often, music video pits men against women, seldom portraying the youthful protagonists with their fists raised collectively, uniting against those structures which are actively conspiring to limit the future of all youth — the military, for example, and an economic system which 'guarantees' 25% unemployment for those who are 18 to 25 years old.

But in this, music video is no different than other mass circulated imagery. It is no more a form of social control than films or television, but it is no less either.

My purpose in doing this survey was to demonstrate that analysis of this material is possible. As viewers, we experience pleasure in moving images, but these pleasures are not above interpretation. Like other forms of "entertainment", music video has content, form and structure. Most often, it seems to mirror the already developed visual languages and signifiers of film. The 'new' look often attributed to music video is, for the most part, a result of its compressed form of presentation. When music video first started being broadcast, it was greeted by those of us who viewed it cynically as commercials for records. Now while this may be true in part, as I began to do this study, I quickly changed my mind. Music video tapes aren't simply commercials, although they may function as such in that they promote records; they are also very often a 'story' much like a film or a television programme is a 'story'. So the experience of watching a music videotape is a kind of synthesis of the experience of watching a commercial and a narrative film all at once. The 'story' presents the values and the form 'sells' them. And this is a very powerful package indeed.

—Lisa Steele

SPRING 1984

AN INTERVIEW BY LYNNE FERNIE

ALIX DOBKIN'S MUSIC REFLECTS her joy in and concern about women's and lesbians' lives. Politically controversial and willing to take risks, she is unabashedly outspoken about topics that, even in lesbian communities, are seldom publicly talked about.

In early October 1983, Alix Dobkin presented lectures in Toronto on the subject of "Sexism and Racism in rock 'n' roll", as well as performing her own music in concert. While she was in the city, we had a lively conversation covering a large range of topics. The following interview represents a portion of that conversation.

LYNNE FERNIE: This is the age of instant communications and yet those of us in so-called 'alternate' communities can't reach each other through the mainstream media. When I saw you in concert, I had an almost medieval picture of you as a kind of minstrel singer, travelling to lesbian communities within large cities, bringing information as well as your songs...

ALIX DOBKIN: It's my minstrel blood! [laughter] I do incorporate information because I consider myself an educator, a community builder and a professional lesbian as well as an entertainer and the mass media aren't appropriate for my work. It needs to be one to one, one by one. The women's movement is strong because it isn't a mass media movement, although it uses mass media and there are women who hear about it through mass communications. But it's really an individual thing — it's slow, it's steady and it's not a fad.

L.F.: I enjoyed the storytelling aspects of your songs and the in-between song raps — hearing information presented in a way that made me want to meet the communities and women you were singing about. It's unusual for songs to be so specific.

A.D.: That's part of the minstrel thing. I used to do a song called "Talking Lesbian Journal" in which I'd

* From FBI memorandum on Alix Dobkin, 27 November 1967; To: Director, FBI (100-425241); From: SAC (agent), Miami (100-15249) (P)

SPRING 1984

name the different communities I'd been to in the States — like in Minneapolis they do this..., in Boston, this is what they have..., and on the West Coast, this is... I was very conscious of bringing information from one community to another, singing about what was going on, what the issues were, what women were concerned with. But that song got dated so fast — communities change, lesbians move all the time, this restaurant closes, an institution dies and another one comes into being.

The song only lasted for a year.

Also, I figured out a couple of years ago that my presence in a community helps women meet who might not normally get to one another. We always try to organize a pot-luck in each city and women will come and talk about issues which concern them. And so I facilitate a kind of networking within a lesbian community which I find worthwhile and kind of wonderful.

L.F.: Songs, stories and performances are an important part of our

ALIX DOBKIN



A DECADE OF BUILDING THE LESBIAN COMMUNITY THROUGH SONG

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oral history and, in your case, they become archival history as well because they are recorded and written on lyric sheets. Is this important to you?

A.D.: Absolutely, yes.

L.F.: Do you think of your performances as healing in any way?

A.D.: Not consciously, but I'm very aware of it. It's been mentioned many times that some women do look at them that way. It's healing to hear reality, to have contact with something that's real. For example, I did the *Canada AM* show the other day. I went in and they put me into makeup first thing, they put this pancake on, mascara and lipstick. Before I knew what was happening — I looked in the mirror and went aaaaagh! I looked like I'd died and somebody was painting a dummy to look sort of like me. I went and did this show and everything was pretend — it was so weird.

L.F.: Did you get to say what you wanted to say?

A.D.: Sure I did. I think I had eight minutes. I'm not complaining because I knew I was in a mass media context, but being in that pretend world was amazing. Pretend fabric, pretend food, pretend people, pretend music, pretend news. So when you hear something real or see something real, it's healing. It can be shocking, but you can respond in a way that validates your reality.

But we should remember that these people who set themselves up with their mass technology are vulnerable — we can take the power of turning off the radio, and take the power of speaking back. They can seem like such idiots if you assert yourself at all — but if you don't they're all powerful.

L.F.: Do you think that lesbian communities have grown or stayed the same? Are they, for instance, being affected by the increase of right wing attitudes?

A.D.: The communities have changed tremendously and I think they've grown a lot. But then, a lot of women drop out, some women get burned out doing political organizing, go away for a while and come back to do something different. There is a turnover. And lesbians move a lot, travel around a lot. I think, on the

whole, the communities seem to be larger; my audiences are bigger. There are variations of course.

It's hard to pinpoint how communities have changed. My impression is that issues sweep a community — certain issues become very current. Racism and anti-Semitism are important issues now; others come about at one time or another — monogamy, non-monogamy, relationship issues, class issues — and although they aren't talked about nearly as much as they should be, they do get talked about. Lately, I've noticed a higher level of discussion. In the old days, it was like "kill each other", and there was a lot of trashing, a lot of hostility.



**I DON'T BELIEVE YOU
CAN DO SERIOUS POLITICS
WITHOUT HAVING FUN —
NOT FOR VERY LONG**

I don't find that so much anymore. There a lot of disagreements and conflicts, but I don't feel the kind of hostility toward one another.

L.F.: I guess it's taken a number of years to work out a kind of ethic — I don't mean a dogma — but a code of ethics about how we act over our disagreements. The "what are we doing fighting each other?" issue is being addressed in itself so we can stop acting out of our trained tendency toward polarization...

A.D.: The horizontal hostility, yes.

L.F.: Speaking about hostilities, I noticed the excerpts from your F.B.I. file in your press release.

A.D.: I sent away for my F.B.I. dossier just to get quotes for my p.r. I got about six inches of files, most of the pages completely blacked out. It

was really hard to find anything useable. You know, they black out stuff — whole pages — horrible, really frustrating.

There's a wonderful article in the *Lesbian Connection*, (a journal published in Michigan) about F.B.I. agents and the presence in the lesbian community of deliberate saboteurs. There has been, as we know, a deliberate effort to destroy the women's movement. This article discusses how these agents work. I was thrilled with the article, not because I'm interested in finding out who's an agent — it doesn't really matter who is — but because it's important to be conscious of the effects of what we do. One of the most effective ways of destroying a movement is to destroy the women who put themselves out, the ones who take the risks. When women are attacking a feminist institution, not with constructive criticism and ideas of how to make it better, but with "this is not good and it should be destroyed", it's a very effective way of destroying the movement. We should alert ourselves to the effect of criticism: how we criticize, what we expect. Destructive criticism has had a devastating effect on our institutions, on individuals, on projects — and we have to be very careful not to destroy what we create.

The *Michigan Women's Music Festival* is one example of this. Women's music festivals are the single most crucial revolutionary institution that I can think of, and last year there was such bad press about *Michigan*. Now, I don't believe that most of the criticism came from agents trying to destroy the festival, but it certainly affected the attendance of the festival this year. I believe that criticisms were one of the factors that kept women away — not the only one, but one of them. It's important to give people and institutions a chance; we've got to give them space to incorporate criticism, to improve, to get better. This is part of criticism. If it's not part of a certain criticism, we need to be suspicious of it.

L.F.: We are forced to 'react' to issues so often that we often react automatically, in the way we've been trained, and in our culture, we're trained toward factionalism. Also, the women's movement has given many

women the strength to get angry, so here it comes...

A.D.: And we also choose who we can be effective against. I mean, I can hurt you a lot easier than I can hurt David Rockefeller, and you can have an impact on me. So when we lash out at each other, we can see how we have an effect.

L.F.: Has this happened to you as a singer or as a lesbian-feminist?

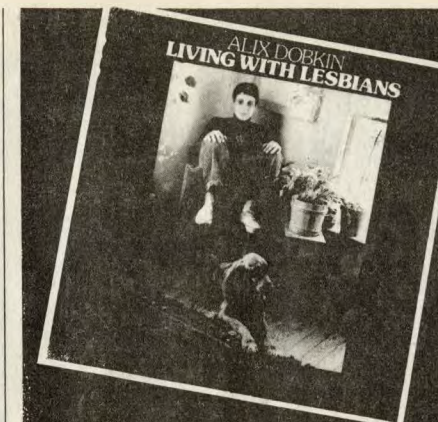
A.D.: Yes, there's been a lot of very hurtful and outrageous kinds of rumours. Not so much lately, but in the mid and late '70s, because I was a target, I put myself visibly out there. I polled my audience about rumours; I asked, first of all, how many had heard about me being a hard-line separatist, about my politics being so heavy. A lot of women raised their hands. I even heard a rumour in California that I had had a son and rejected him — of course, that's totally ridiculous.

L.F.: I've noticed that a lot of women who used to do women-only concerts are now involved in alliance politics, in performing to mixed audiences. Are all your concerts women-only audiences?

A.D.: Almost all of them. I'm trying to figure out how to do more mixed concerts. If there were a substantial number of women, lesbian or straight, who would never come to a women-only concert then, yes, I want to reach them. I do a whole different rap, a different selection of songs. I would never do some of the more personal songs to a mixed audience. When there's a man in the audience — even if he's a friend of yours, even if you like him — you get into "what is he thinking? Is he hurt? Is he feeling excluded?" and you worry about his feelings. I don't want anybody to have to worry about men at my concerts. But the main reason, really, that I do mostly women-only concerts is because it's more fun and I believe in having fun. I don't believe you can do serious politics without having fun — not for very long.

L.F.: Your concert was extremely intimate; you've obviously worked with the audience/performer relationship in such a way that the audience can participate in your performance.

A.D.: It really goes along with what I do. My music is based on con-



**WOMEN ON THE LEFT
NEED TO KNOW ABOUT
AND EXPERIENCE
LESBIAN-FEMINIST
CULTURE...**

sciousness raising — I want to create that intimacy and I do it largely with the content of my songs. But it's also my style and a conscious attempt to establish a peer relationship with the audience. For example, I'm not afraid to make "mistakes". I try not to, but if I do, I think it breaks down the mystification of a performer. If I come across as a finished, polished product, it gives nobody space to be who they

are, to make mistakes, to improve, to change. I think it's very important for public figures to go through changes, to make mistakes, to correct them.

L.F.: Often, "mistakes" in performances provide the entry for an audience to relate to you...

A.D.: Yes, as long as you're not embarrassed about it. I also want to expose parts of my experiences, those that I've a handle on, and I want to share them. It's always illuminating for me to hear other women talk about their experiences; that's the basis of consciousness raising. I also think it has to do with the folk genre. I am a folkie at heart, that's where I come from. No matter if I do show tunes or a little of this and that, it's a function of folk, a very individual kind of thing.

L.F.: But there are numerous strategies that we can use in terms of the 'politics' of music. Do you think that taking music, feminist ideas and images into the mainstream airwaves is also important?

A.D.: I think it's very important to have something positive in the mainstream, to have something that can feed women. We need it all.

L.F.: Is defining your audience, your community, easier than trying to handle, for example, the bar scene — which can be a horrifying thing to have to do?

ALIX DOBKIN'S HERSTORY

Alix Dobkin began her career as a folksinger in the early '60s while she was getting her degree in Fine Arts in Philadelphia. After graduating, she moved to NYC, singing full time and working steadily on the northeast and midwest folk circuit and basing herself at the now-famous Greenwich Village's *The Gaslight Cafe*. Early musical influences — Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, The Red Army Chorus plus Yiddish songs of resistance and humour — were furthered by the contact with the top folk artists which played at *The Gaslight*.

In '65, Dobkin married the manager of *The Gaslight Cafe* and

they moved to Florida for a year where they opened *The Gaslight South*. In 1968 she returned to NYC, playing at Village clubs and in 1970 her daughter Adrian was born. Shortly afterwards, she separated from her husband and began writing and singing music for women — and not long after that, she came out publicly as a Lesbian.

In 1973, with Kay Gardner, she released the album, *Lavender Jane Loves Women*, followed by a second album in 1975, *Living With Lesbians*. These were among the first albums in North America to include overt lesbian content. Her third album, *XXAlix*, was released in 1980.

A.D.: Yes, and in the music business too, in general. I did deal with some of those boys years ago. Who needs it! I mean, I'm not trying to make it in showbiz. I don't want to make it. I know what it is, and I know enough to stay away from it. I want success, I want recognition, I want a good size audience, but then I'm very flexible. I'll do a small living room concert and that's a whole different kind of experience. I like both larger and smaller concerts and I like to be able to have room for anything that works for me and can get the message across, that reaches women and lesbians. That's my purpose in living.

L.F.: How do you finance yourself and your music?

A.D.: I've borrowed money for each album and paid each album back. Now I'm in the process of paying *XXAlix* back. I've made agreements to repay my loans according to sales, so there's no pressure. A couple of loans I've had to pay back regardless of sales, but the most substantial loans have been from women who have agreed that I will pay them back as I sell the records. My record sales are slow but they're steady and I think they'll sell forever. So I will eventually be able to pay back and — I'm ahead of schedule.

But, I've borrowed money, and between the sales of albums and cassettes and my bookings, I'm able to make my marginal living. And I try to keep — my needs are modest and I like it like that. I like to keep my life simple so I can support myself on not all that much money.

L.F.: Do you do your own bookings and business?

A.D.: Ruth Dworin from *Womynly Way Productions* booked me this tour because she had the contacts and it really was much easier, but normally I do all my own bookings. Besides the fact that I can't afford a manager or an agent, I like to know everything that's going on, I like to be in touch. And I don't take on so much that it's overwhelming. I tour twice a year and the rest of the time I might do a weekend or two weeks at the most, rarely, so I can handle it. I'm a small industry.

L.F.: When did you begin to publicly identify yourself as a Jewish lesbian?

A.D.: Around 1976 or 1977. I was

lovers with Liza Cowan and our friends were Jewish and we started talking about being Jewish. And there were things coming out in the lesbian media about ethnic and cultural identification. There are all kinds of lesbians and we need all of us — we need all cultures and influences in our lives. L.F.: Have you experienced anti-Semitism or racism in lesbian communities?

A.D.: Sure, oh sure, and it's very painful. Mostly it's neglect — white women being unaware that we're missing some people. The festivals have been an important key for white women in learning how to deal with racism and there are women of colour who are beginning to feel comfortable at the music festivals. This is definitely true with the women of colour that I got to know at the *Connecticut Festival*, women who spoke and reported from their Caucus. There seems to be a new phase beginning here; I certainly hope so. But there's plenty of racism in the lesbian, feminist, 'you-name-it' movements because it's a reflection of the racist world we live in.

L.F.: As feminists and lesbians, we are trying to integrate a number of analyses into our communities and it can be difficult. Do you define yourself, politically, as a member of the left?

A.D.: I used to be a card-carrying communist in the '50s when I was a teenager. I got very good Marxist training and it was important in order for me to begin to develop an analysis and to question authority. The first place I ever heard about male chauvinism and racism was in the Party. But after you get in touch with the questioning of authority, with realizing that there is another way to look at the world, it can be counter-productive for women to get stuck in the male-defined left. I think that we can use some things from the left — but remember that it developed from male thinking and it often has very little for women. To me, women's ways of being together, materially as well as emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually, are still being worked out.

The rhetoric of the left can be so self-defeating and in the States it has sometimes been destructive for les-

bians and the women's movement. Women like Jane Alpert — in her article "Mother Right" that came out in the early '70s — as well as other women, exposed the male left and exposed their strategy to destroy the women's movement if they couldn't take it over. They haven't been able to take it over and they never will. But the rhetoric of the issues of class and race have been used as such divisive and deadly weapons against women, used to isolate women and put them down. I think women have gotten a lot smarter about this and not gone for the rhetoric so much, but it's taken a toll.

I believe that the basic oppression is man/woman and as soon as men can't oppress women, as soon as women are autonomous, a whole set of oppression and exploitation will be eliminated. Sure, women can be racist, anti-Semitic, women have bad attitudes, women can do terrible things. But the original oppression is men over women — that was the first and it set the model.

L.F.: But it is extremely important for us to have an economic analysis and model, an analysis of the relationships between oppression and wealth in terms of class and race. I agree with you that this model can be counter-productive for women without the feminist analyses of gender relations and power, but it seems that we are insisting upon that inclusion...

A.D.: Left wing analyses are seductive because they're often the first and only alternative that we hear to the consumer-capitalist-evil society that we live in. Then here comes something else that says something different and we go, "oh, that's it". But that's not necessarily IT. If it shows that there are other ways to think, good, and if there are elements in it that are useful, good. But it's not the absolute answer. Women on the left need to know about and experience lesbian-feminist culture — like the larger folk audiences, they need to experience women's music.

Dobkin's albums and tapes, as well as her book, *Alix Dobkin's Adventures in Women's Music*, can be obtained from: *Ladyslipper Music*, P.O. Box 3124, Durham, N.C., U.S.A. 27705. In Toronto, her records are available at: *Glad Day Books*, 643 Yonge St., 2nd floor, and the *Toronto Women's Bookstore*, (new location), 78 Harbord, Toronto.

POPULAR THEATRE IN KENYA

WORKING WITH PEASANTS AND WORKERS IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST POVERTY AND OPPRESSION

Popular theatre in the Third World often claims to be a tool of protest and struggle and a means of social transformation but rarely does it challenge the status quo in a significant way. Too often it becomes as marginalized as the peasants and workers it represents, with little real impact on the society as a whole.

One significant exception has been the popular theatre work of the Kamiriithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre (KCECC) *, a peasant- and worker-controlled organization in rural Kenya. Its voicing of protest against injustice and corruption and its championing of workers' rights and popular expression made it a major target for official repression.

ROSS KIDD • PART ONE

IN 1977 THE PERFORMANCE OF KCECC's first drama, a community production in which over 200 villagers participated, was stopped and one of the organizers, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, imprisoned. Early in 1981 its second drama was stopped, its license as a community organization withdrawn, and the community-built 2,000 seat theatre smashed to the ground.

Why would peasant-produced dramas call down the wrath of the

* In Gikuyu it is known as Mucii wa Muingi Mugi.

Kenyan government? Why has a programme which has significantly reduced illiteracy and alcoholism, increased employment opportunities, fostered a people's culture, and raised the awareness and participation of villagers been suppressed? Why has Kamiriithu made such a powerful effect on Kenyan society while popular theatre in other parts of Africa has remained ephemeral and insignificant? In order to fully understand this we must take a look at its history.

Linda Harris

Ngugi wa Mirii on the KCECC stage



History of Domination and Resistance

KCECC WAS FORMED IN 1976 BUT it is an outgrowth of the continuing resistance by peasants and workers against foreign domination which has gone on for the last five centuries. It is an extension of their struggle against invasion, slavery, forced labour, alienation of their land, heavy taxation with only token representation, exploitative working conditions, and cultural genocide.

This struggle started back in the 1500's with the invasion of Arab slave traders and later, Portuguese colonizers. Each of these invasions was beaten back and it took four centuries of fighting before colonialism — under the British — prevailed. One of the last hold-outs were the Kalenjin, which under Koitalel put up a fierce struggle from 1895 to 1905 before going down to defeat.

Once the military conquest was complete, the colonial authorities seized 8 1/2 million acres of the most fertile land in the Central Highlands of Kenya, turned it over to white settlers, and herded the displaced Africans onto reserves. Then through forced labour (initially), taxation, and a ban on African production of certain cash crops, Africans were forced to work (and squat) on the European estates. They also introduced a labour control system requiring every African to carry a pass.

Corralled in the reserves, deprived of their land, forced into working for the settlers, and humiliated through racial discrimination, the Africans fought back. They formed nationalist organizations to pressure for reforms through petitions, marches, demonstrations, etc. Each of these challenges was suppressed, often brutally.¹ Organizations were banned and the leaders detained but new movements arose to take their place.

During the 30s and 40s much of the nationalist energies went into supporting direct lobbying by Jomo Kenyatta in Britain.² In the late 40s and early 50s, it became increasingly clear that the reformist option was closed. For a

while educational work and strikes replaced petitions and appeals, but even those challenges were suppressed and the leaders imprisoned. A militant group of workers and peasants — the Forty Group which later came to be known as Mau Mau — took over the nationalist initiative. Eschewing the reformist or constitutional approach of the middle-class nationalists they developed a broad-based mass organization and launched an armed struggle with revolutionary aims. Through an oath of commitment and dedication

As a member of parliament, Jaime Kariuku, put it — Kenya became a country of ten millionaires and ten million beggars

they bound each freedom fighter to the goals of driving the British out of Kenya and overturning the system of foreign domination and capitalist exploitation. (Maina Wa Kinyatti, 1977).

The landless labourers, small farmers, squatters, and urban workers who made up the ranks of the guerilla army stood to gain the most from a real revolution — one which gave them back their land, basic rights, decent working conditions, and a greater say in the running of their country. Much of the fighting pitted the uneducated and landless peasants (the forest fighters) against the educated, land-owning classes (the "home guards" and "loyalists") many of whom sided with the colonialists.

This landed class had developed through mission education and the colonial civil service, through the benefits derived by chiefs who collaborated with the colonial regime, and through the economic opportunities which opened up in the 40s and 50s for a

minority of the African population on the reserves. Recognizing the power of the peasants' and workers' movements, the colonial regime moved quickly to strengthen the position of the landed middle class as a buffer against the radicalism of the popular movements. A major tool for this was the land consolidation and registration programme carried out in the late 50s while the freedom fighters were in detention. This programme legitimized the occupation and ownership of large blocks of land by the richer African farmers, many of whom were colonial collaborators.³

While by the end of the 50s many of the forest fighters had been arrested and detained and their leaders (e.g., Kimathi) killed, their determined resistance had made an impact. The British were forced to accept "constitutional" or "flag" independence — i.e., African political but not economic control. Working with the bourgeois nationalists who, under Kenyatta, returned to lead the constitutional process, the colonial regime worked out a formula for Independence which reassured foreign capital and the European settlers.

So on the 12th December 1963, Kenya got its "constitutional" independence. In spite of a decade of armed struggle and two centuries of militant resistance to colonial invasion and rule, the political settlement left the economy firmly under foreign control. The new ruling class entered into an alliance with foreign capital as the junior partner in a neo-colonial arrangement. Multinational capital moved into Kenya in a big way, taking the dominant economic position formerly occupied by the white settlers. Power and wealth became more and more concentrated in the hands of a small ruling clique of Kenyans. As member of parliament, Jaime Kariuki, put it — Kenya became a country of 10 millionaires and 10 million beggars.⁴ The richer farmers, the only ones with access to credit, reaped the benefits of the schemes to buy back land from the European settlers. This landed middle class used their newly acquired power to gain control over the agricultural sector, trade, and small business.

The peasants and workers, who had done all the fighting, lost out. They remained on the whole landless, poor.

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Trade unions lost their right to strike and their independence of state control. The opposition party was harassed and finally banned. Those who spoke out publicly against the ruling clique's unbridled corruption and concentration of wealth were detained or, in a few cases, assassinated. Ethnic loyalties were manipulated to build division among the working class. (The most cynical example of this was the reintroduction of oath-taking on an ethnic basis.) Symbols of traditional culture such as *Harambee* (All pull together) were used to divert peasant energies into ethnic concerns, to diffuse class tensions, and to paper over the destruction of the peasants' and workers' movements.

This is the context in which the KCECC came into being.

Kamiriithu A Place of Struggle

THE KAMIRIITHU COMMUNITY Educational and Cultural Centre was started in a place with a long tradition of struggle. In fact its existence as a village was a direct result of the liberation struggle.

Kamiriithu lay in the middle of the area of greatest conflict during the liberation war and many people from the area had joined the forest fighters. Because of its strategic location, the



The KCECC Stage invaded by sheep after the closing of Ngaahika Ndeena

British decided to use the site as an "Emergency Village", one of a number of fortified concentration villages into which Kenyan villagers were herded.⁵ Their own homes were burnt down and they were driven into Kamiriithu, which was a kind of fortified forced labour camp. Later in 1957 the village was made into a permanent settlement and while the forest fighters languished in colonial detention camps, land consolidation was carried out, ensuring that the land was mainly deeded to the richer farmers, many of whom were colonial collaborators ("Home Guards" or "Loyalists"). Kamiriithu became a labour reserve, supplying

workers to the tea and coffee plantations in the nearby area (the former White Highlands) and to the industries in Limuru and Nairobi (32 kilometres away).⁶

Today Kamiriithu has a population of over 10,000 people. It is partly a "dormitory village". Villagers commute each day to their work-places. Some of the villagers live on the plantations or industrial estates but once they are no longer productive or are fired, they are forced to move back to Kamiriithu.

Those who are not employed in the plantations or in the Limuru factories eke out a living through self-employment and/or casual labour, working for richer farmers, selling vegetables at the Limuru market, brewing and selling beer, and in some cases engaging in petty crime or prostitution. There is no security of employment: each worker competes with many others for the few jobs available. Even when they get employed, the wages are kept very low because of the large pool of unemployed workers.

Many of the villagers are squatters who lost their land through white settlement or through the land consolidation process of the late 50s. Some have been forced to sell their small plots because of failure to repay bank loans. Those without their land live in temporary structures built on footpaths and are constantly faced with the threat of eviction.



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The village is not only a labour reserve but also a "rural slum": it bears all of the costs of reproducing the labour force with minimal help from the state or the corporations who profit from their labour.⁷ Villagers have to cope on their own without basic services — water, medical facilities, sanitation, street lighting, etc. Whenever peasants make demands for these services they are told to organise their own self-help effort or *Harambee* — in effect this means collecting contributions from and praising the Kenyan businessmen and rich farmers who have benefitted from exploiting the peasants. This also represents an attempt to channel peasant energies into acceptable channels, diffusing class struggle, and promoting class collaboration.

Starting KCECC, A People's Organization

THE ONLY TOKEN SERVICE TO this community of 10,000 people was a community centre — and even that had been built through community effort. During the liberation war the colonial authorities set aside a four-acre plot of land for "social purposes". When no assistance from the colonial government materialized, the village youth built a shelter and used it to meet and talk and perform traditional dances.

After Independence in 1963 the centre was converted into a vocational training centre for young people. With the help of the Kiambu Area Council the villagers built a three-roomed wooden building in which carpentry classes were held. This training programme was abandoned in 1973 when the Area Councils were abolished. Funds available for village-level social services dried up and the centre fell into disuse.

As bureaucratic neglect, unemployment and insecurity deepened, the villagers decided to revive the centre and use it to do something about their worsening situation.⁸ The initiative represented a convergence of interests. On one hand there were the peasants and workers who had seen their hopes go up in smoke as the real meaning of

"Uhuru" became transparent. In spite of Independence their life remained the same — no land to cultivate or on which to build a house; insecurity of employment and exploitation in their workplaces; their own culture denigrated, tokenized, and supplanted by the new foreign consumer culture.

On the other hand there were a number of intellectuals — teachers, university staff, civil servants, etc. — who lived in the Kamiriithu area, who shared the feeling of betrayal about the

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**Nobody
can make
a decision without
consulting the
people because
every decision
affects the
people**

nationalist struggle. Many of them had been involved in protests against foreign control of Kenya's economic, political and cultural life and had begun to recognize the importance of working with the peasants and workers in this struggle.

Foremost among them was novelist and playwright Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the head of the University of Nairobi's literature department. He had played a leading role in popularizing Kenya's history of resistance and had organized a number of struggles against the monopoly position held by foreign culture in Kenya — e.g., the domination of Broadway musicals and West End plays at the national theatre and the pre-eminence given to English rather than African languages at the University of Nairobi. In his writings he had made a powerful case for developing a national culture out of the creative energies of peasants and workers (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1972). When he

took a university theatre group to Kamiriithu in 1976 during the annual tour by the travelling theatre programme run by Ngugi's university department, he recognized the possibility for putting his argument into practice. For many of the villagers it was their first exposure to drama and it sparked a lot of interest.

Another key organizer and supporter of the KCECC was Ngugi wa Mirii, an adult educator and research worker employed by the University of Nairobi. He had become fed up with the subservient role played by adult education in the Kenyan social system and was interested in the radical teaching methodology of Paulo Freire as a means of transforming Kenyan society.

At the initial community meeting to revive the centre the response was enthusiastic and after a few more planning meetings a programme was agreed on and an organizing structure established. A sub-committee was formed for each activity of the centre (fund-raising, adult education, cultural activity, etc.) and a central committee to which all the sub-committees reported. Ngugi wa Thiong'o was elected chairman of the cultural committee and Ngugi wa Mirii the chairman of the adult education committee.

The KCECC started with what seemed like conventional aims — to provide a meeting place for the villagers and a programme of integrated rural development — adult education, study groups, cultural activity, economic production, and health. What distinguished it, however, was its structure and process — the peasants and workers were in control (rather than government bureaucrats or the middle-class) and it was run in a highly collective fashion. The villagers made the decisions and each decision was taken on the basis of extensive discussions among the membership. As one member put it: "Nobody can make a decision without consulting the people because every decision affects the people" (Kahiga, 1977b). Even academic writing on the Kamiriithu experience (by the two Ngugi's) had to be cleared first with the Executive Committee. As a result of this commitment to work collectively, agreements represented real commitments and the villagers regarded

the centre as their own organization they had ultimate control.

Learning to Read the World

THE FIRST ACTIVITY TAKEN UP was adult literacy. Many of the peasants felt humiliated by their lack of literacy and wanted to learn to read. They regarded this as a priority. Ngugi wa Mirii offered to teach one of the classes and to train others as teachers using the Freirean literacy approach. Two hundred people came to participate in the classes, but due to the limited resources, it was only possible to accommodate 56 — in the first phase — those with no previous education at all.

This was no conventional literacy programme! Unlike traditional literacy work which conditions people to accept the structure of inequality and their compliant role in it, the Kamiriithu programme encouraged people to question what was happening to them, to overcome the rationalizations and myths provided by society, and to begin to understand why they were landless, poor, etc. In Freire's terms they learned "to read the world".

Unlike most literacy programmes the Kamiriithu programme had no drop-outs and by the end of the six-month period the 56 participants could all read and write. Many of the students had even started to write their life histories, in a few cases running to 10,000 words in length!

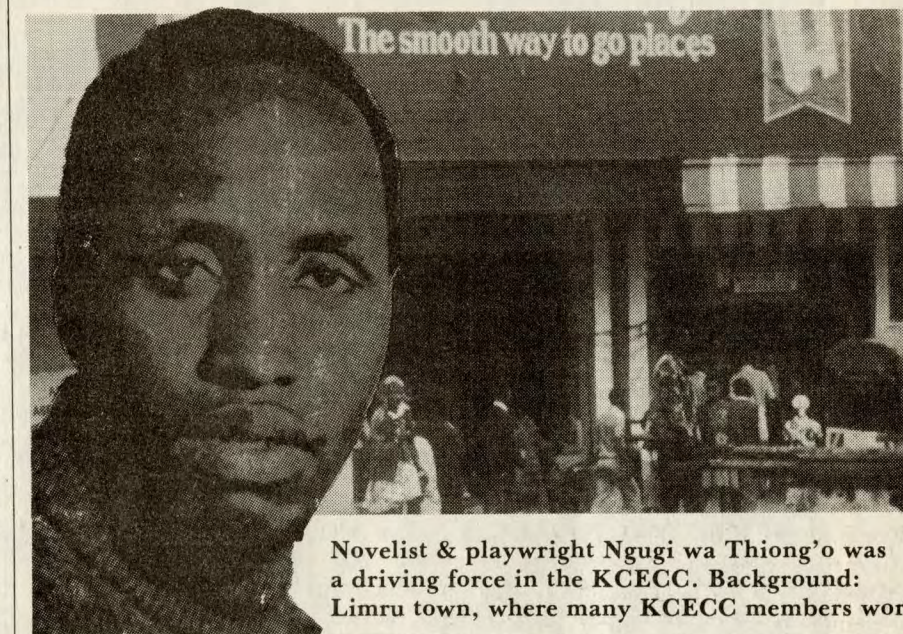
The Process of Script-Writing

WITH THE INTEREST CREATED through the literacy programme, the Centre then debated what to do next. They wanted to continue with an adult education programme — but they wanted a medium which would involve everyone in the village. Drama suited the purpose: the new literates were familiar with it, having used it in the form of role-playing and short skits

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in the literacy classes and having seen the plays put on by the university travelling theatre group. Drama would keep the new literates involved and the script, which would focus on their lives and history, would be an excellent text for follow-on reading.

Drama would also help to spread the analysis and thinking to the whole village and create a forum for community discussion. The process of creating the play would involve the whole community and, it was hoped, might provide a source of employment and a means of raising income for the centre's programme.



Novelist & playwright Ngugi wa Thiong'o was a driving force in the KCECC. Background: Limru town, where many KCECC members work

The literacy committee and the cultural committee held several meetings to discuss the content for the play. Then the two Ngugi's were commissioned to write a draft playscript, drawing on the discussions of the two committees and the literacy classes plus the autobiographies written by the new literates. The script was to "reflect the people's experiences, concerns, aspirations, grievances, etc., and the problems and contradictions in the village, using the words and expressions of the people". (Ngugi wa Mirii, 1982).

Once the draft was produced, it was reviewed and amended by the literacy students and the KCECC Executive Committee. Then it was presented and discussed at a number of public readings. In these sessions, which went on for two months, the script was read

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out, discussed, and criticized. Where the analysis was felt to be inadequate, the community suggested changes. In one case, for example, they demanded "a more rigorous questioning of the acquisitive values which had come with Western culture". (Wanjala, 1978). In effect it became the community's play. Everyone felt that he or she had contributed to it:

This play was not a one-man's act. It was the result of co-operation among many people. For instance, the whole *Gitiro* opera sequence in the play was written word for word at the dictation of an illiterate peasant woman at Kamiriithu. (Gacheru, 1979)

The People's Play: A History of Struggle

THE PLAY *NGAAHIKA NDEENDA* (I Will Marry When I Want) talks about the people of Kamiriithu — their lives, history, struggles, songs, experiences, hopes and concerns. It exposes through satire the manipulation

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of religion, the greed and corruption of the ruling classes, the treachery of colonial collaborators ("loyalists" or "home guards"), and the exploitative practices of the multinationals. The central character of the play (Kigunda) is a poor farm labourer employed by a rich farmer and former colonial collaborator (Kioi). Kigunda is swindled out of his small plot of land by Kioi, aided and abetted by the manipulations of religion. His daughter, impregnated by Kioi's son, is forced to drop out of school and to start working on a coffee plantation. She falls in love with a worker from the Bata Shoe Company and resists the men who come to seduce her, saying, "I will marry when I want". At the end of the play the worker organizes a strike at the Bata Shoe Factory and the daughter leads a struggle against the multinational owner of the coffee plantation.

One particular strength of the play is in the songs, resurrected from the Mau Mau struggle. They reinforce the central message of the play: that the only option of the peasants and workers is to work together to transform their country and free it from foreign domination. The songs helped to bridge the generations in the community, providing a chance for the older people to teach the younger about the liberation struggle and the songs created during the struggle — a period of tremendous cultural activity.

Building a New Sense of Community

ONCE THE SCRIPT HAD BEEN agreed on, a group of actors were selected — again the decision was taken by the whole community — and the rehearsals started. The interest was very high and everyone in the community pitched in for the rehearsals, which took place in the evenings and weekends. Sometimes as many as 300 people came to the open clearing in the village which served as the rehearsal space — to take part in the acting and singing, to join in the discussion, to suggest songs to reinforce the message, to direct the dance movements, to watch and enjoy. Working together on

this ambitious production provided a powerful experience of "community", of collective effort.

More and more villagers joined the production as new aspects were added. A woman's choir was formed, led by the 50-year old woman who had composed the opera sequence in the play. A group of young unemployed men and a few workers from the Bata Shoe Company, who had already shown an interest in instrumental music, were encouraged to form an orchestra — to provide songs for the play and music for the interval. Another group took on the job of preparing costumes and

In the end, about 200 villagers took part in the production

props. A further group was formed to make food for the participants. Each of these groups worked separately on their own aspect of the production and reported regularly to the Executive Committee. Sessions were also held in which the different parts of the performance were integrated. In the end about 200 villagers took part in the production.

The theatre production became the central experience of the community. Outside the rehearsals people took on the identities of their characters in the play and referred to situations in the play in arguments and conversations. They rediscovered "their collective strength — that they could accomplish anything — even transform the whole village and their lives without a single *Harambee* of charity". Their self-confidence grew and there was a significant decline in drinking and crime:

By the time we came to perform it was generally understood and accepted that drunkenness was not allowed at the centre. For a village which was known for drunken brawls, it was a remarkable achievement of our collective self-discipline that we never had a single incident of fighting or a single drunken disruption for all the six months of public rehearsals and performances.

(Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1981)

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The whole effort unleashed a wealth of talent and demystified the creative process. Some of the examples of this burst of creativity and self-awareness were given by Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1981b)

Before the play was over we received three scripts of plays in the Gikuyu language, two written by a worker, and one by a primary school teacher. One unemployed youth, who had tried to commit suicide four times because he thought his life was useless, now suddenly discovered that he had a tremendous voice which, when raised in song kept its listeners on dramatic tenterhooks.

To be continued in the next FUSE

¹ The 1922 demonstration protesting the arrest of nationalist leader Harry Thuku was put down through gunfire killing over 150 demonstrators. (Maina wa Kinyatti, 1977)

² Resistance also took a cultural form. As a defence against the colonial conditioning and cultural repression of the mission schools, Kenyans developed with their own resources a whole movement of independent schools in which their own history and cultural heritage was taught. (In the 50s the school population numbered as many as 62,000 students.) As a vehicle of protest and a means of organizing, songs, dances, drama, and poetry were developed on nationalist themes. (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1981; Maina wa Kinyatti, 1981) While the Europeans created an escapist, enclave culture in the segregated theatre-houses of Nairobi, the young Dedan Kimathi, later to become the leader of the liberation struggle, started the open-air Gichamu theatre movement as a means of rallying support for the nationalist cause.

³ The result of this process: over half of all Kikuyus present became landless and more than half of the land was given to less than 2% of the population. (Ng'ang'a, 1977)

⁴ Soon after making this statement in March 1975, Kariuki was shot dead in the streets of Nairobi.

⁵ This was one of the earliest uses of the "protected hamlet" or "villagization" strategy later employed in attempting to contain anti-colonial struggles in Vietnam, Rhodesia, etc. The object of this mass incarceration was to instil a "culture of fear" and to break the freedom fighters' base of support.

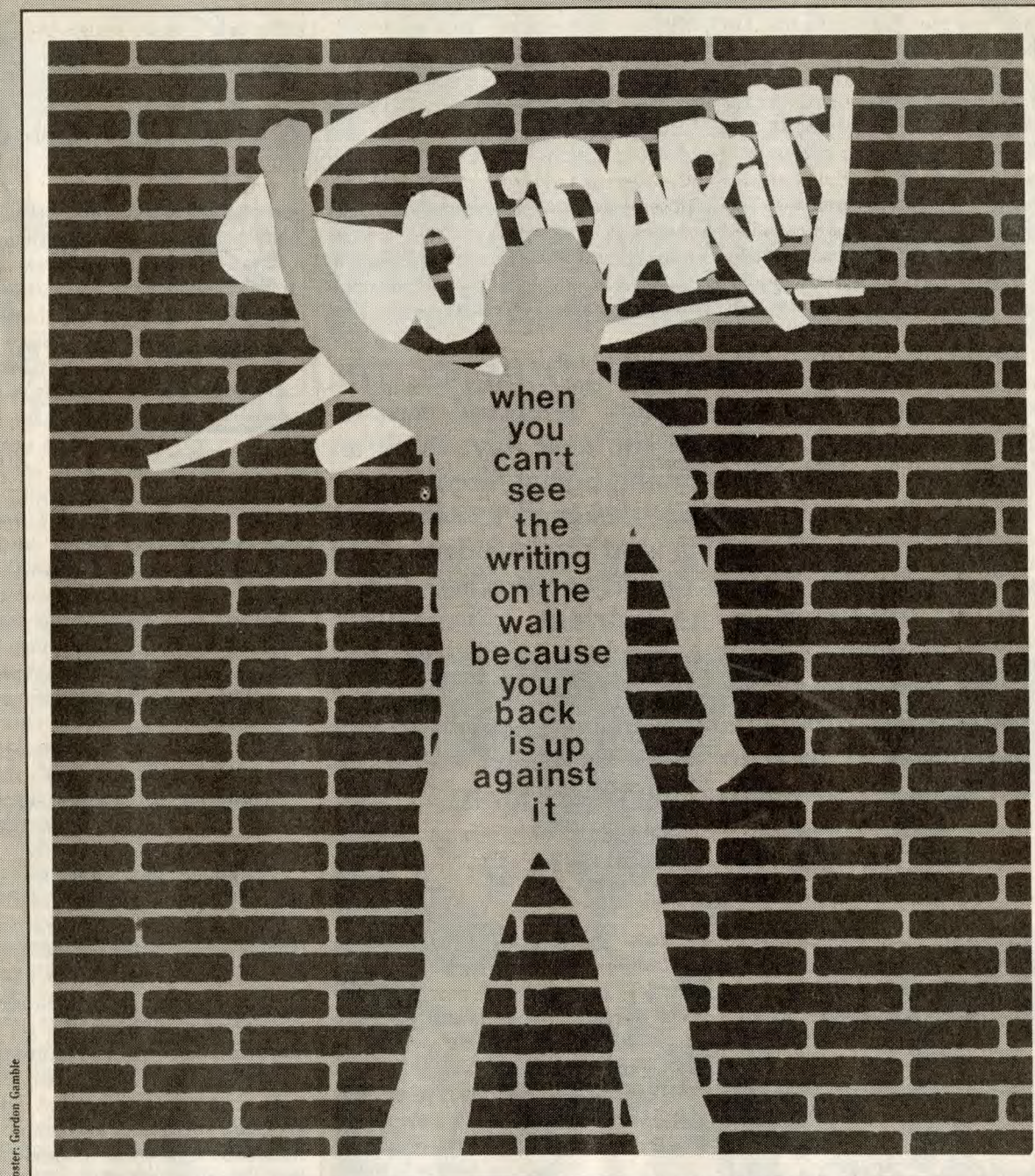
⁶ The plantations and industries are largely owned by multinationals, the most prominent being Brooke Bond which runs the large tea estates and the Canadian owned Bata Shoe Company, owner of Limuru's largest industry, the shoe factory.

⁷ To underline the precariousness of their existence, these rural slums were called "Shauri Moyo", meaning in Swahili, "It's up to you". Here again the slogan of self-reliance is used, a) to blame the slum-dwellers for their poverty and landlessness, b) to absolve the state and the foreign corporations (which benefit from this cheap pool of labour) from the responsibility of providing adequate services, jobs, etc., c) to promote the ideology of competitive individualism, that "getting ahead" is a matter of individual effort.

⁸ The initial driving force behind the revitalization of the centre was Njeeri wa Aamoni, the area's community development assistant, who encouraged everyone in the village to come over to the initial planning meetings.

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Edited by Sara Diamond.



Poster: Gordon Gamble

B.C. SOLIDARITY

WHAT IT MEANT
WHAT IT COULD MEAN

In this special FUSE supplement, active participants look back critically at the Solidarity experience of last summer/fall in B.C.

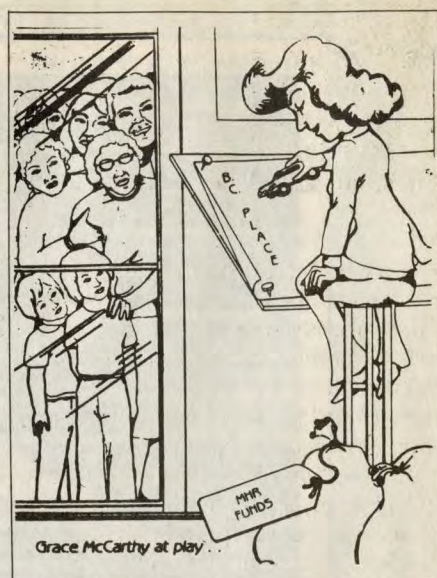
WHERE THE
FRASER RIVER FLOWSTHE BIRTH OF
SOLIDARITY IN B.C.

FOR THE CITIZENS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA, THE sun set on one world on July 6th, 1983 and rose on something completely different the next day. With an astounding arrogance, the reigning Social Credit party introduced a legislative package designed to obliterate many of the services and rights won through decades of political struggle. Their plans directly contradicted their May 7th electoral platform of restraint, job creation, guarantees against public sector job loss, medicare extra-billing, etc. Despite a rhetoric of restraint, the new budget boosted provincial government spending by 12%, with a half a billion dollars going to such successful mega-projects as B.C.'s moribund coal industry.

SARA DIAMOND

THE INSPIRATION FOR THIS assault on the province's standard of living comes directly from B.C.'s Fraser Institute, an economic policy group which is the Canadian equivalent of Milton Friedman. The Institute's funding is strictly multinational and their vision of economic and political well-being runs somewhere

between the streets of Santiago in September of 1983 and Reagan's America. In their brave new world all social services, from health care, to education and counselling, would be run by private industries on a "pay as you go" basis. As one Fraser seer stated, it's the existence of services for single mothers that create single



Courtesy Socialist Challenge

mothers; unemployment insurance and welfare that create unemployment, and so on. No surprise then, that as the B.C. government cut millions from the public education budget, it sank additional millions into private schools. Grace McCarthy, the Minister responsible for "human resources" in B.C. assured us that the church and family would pick up the slack, just like in the "good old days". A perfect rationale for eliminating support for incest and child abuse victims, and sending them back to daddy.

The government's goal is a complete restructuring of social relations including a decline in the real wages of workers, the gutting of union protection (the major block to all-out exploitation) and the elimination of all governmental barriers to a free marketplace — such as Human Rights legislation, the Rentalsman, rent controls, consumer protection laws and agencies, medicare, and employment standards legislation. Linked to this is the centralization of government, increased surveillance and use of the courts, and the introduction of microtechnology on every level in both the public and private sectors.

With this in mind, the Social Credit government introduced 28 pieces of legislation and a new budget. Public funding for education, health care, social services, environmental protection and forestry maintenance was drastically reduced: twenty-five percent of public sector jobs would be cut in 1983. Health legislation increased user fees; it allowed the Medical Services Commission to restrict the

THREE THOUSAND TEACHERS WILL LOSE
THEIR JOBS, IN ADDITION TO SEVEN
THOUSAND TEACHING JOBS ALREADY AXED

number of doctors on the medical plan in a given area, to restrict services that a patient may receive and to have access to confidential medical records. It enabled the creation of a three-tiered medical system with extra-billing and opting out from medicare permitted.

The powers of local school boards, college boards and municipal governments were removed and placed in the hands of the provincial cabinet. B.C.'s effective thirty person Human Rights Commission was dismantled, to be replaced by a five person appointed council with no enforcement powers. Proposed revisions of the Human Rights Code would allow discrimination on the basis of language, weight, height, pregnancy and sexual orientation. The burden of proof would now be on the complainant who would have to pay the costs of the complaint as well as prove that there was "intent to discriminate". Legal aid was drastically cut.

Employment standards legislation was revised: workers with union contracts would no longer be covered. This excluded thousands of women from maternity leave protection and equal pay, and many workers from overtime and job security rights. Employers could now apply for union decertification when a contract expired.

Public sector legislation extended wage controls (minus five to plus five percent), and allowed firing without cause with no regard to seniority, opening the door to wholesale union-busting and sexual harassment. Provincial employees could no longer negotiate working conditions, such as contracting out, lay-off procedure, shift schedules, etc.

There has been a 41% cut to post-secondary student assistance and cuts in post-secondary funding. Tuition fees have sky-rocketed. The Greater Vancouver school board lost \$27 million dollars from its budget. Three thousand teachers will lose their jobs, in addition to seven thousand teaching

jobs already axed. (Student:teacher ratios are already 1:40 in some schools.) Daycare subsidies for parents were cut. English as a Second Language and special needs programmes are going or gone.

Despite increased budget allowances for welfare, rates are frozen. Work incentive programmes for recipients, such as the C.I.P. grant of \$50/month to disabled community volunteers disappeared. The government "de-institutionalized" mentally disabled people, throwing them into the community with no support apparatus. Service cuts include: The Women's Health Collective; all birth control

counselling (Planned Parenthood, Serena, Woomb); post-partum counselling; family support centres; seniors drop-ins; the Linda Williams Community Correctional Centre for women; The Senator Hotel (residential drop-in for young prostitutes and street kids); child abuse teams; legal aid to battered and separated women; parent-support projects; family places (drop-ins); Vancouver Status of Women; consumer protection centres etc.

A new residential tenancy act will abolish the Rentalsman (ombudsman for renters), phase out rent controls, and give landlords the right to evict



ON OCTOBER 15, THERE WERE 60-80,000 PEOPLE CIRCLING THE HOTEL VANCOUVER, SHOUTING 'GENERAL STRIKE, GENERAL STRIKE'

without cause. Within weeks of its presentation there were reports of 80-100% rent increases and landlords refusing housing to minorities.

The legislative package declared open season on women, seniors, immigrants, children, minorities, lesbians, gays, trade unionists, small businessmen.... Its intent was to demoralize and isolate individuals, and to throw groups into conflict in their attempt to protect themselves against cuts. Instead, it gave birth to the broadest social movement in the province's history; a movement which had the potential to defeat the Socreds and win the hearts and minds of the B.C. population.

Soon after the budget came down unionists, feminists, community groups, churches, human rights advocates and minority groups came together to form the *Lower Mainland Coalition Against the Budget*. Organizing meetings for a new women's coalition, *Women Against the Budget*, drew over 300 women

from widely varied walks of life, creating an unprecedented unity around women's issues. Coalitions sprang up amongst tenants, minority groups, gays and lesbians; CLC affiliated unions and CCU unions dropped their historic differences and vowed to work together to defeat the legislation.

On July 23 the first anti-budget street demonstration brought out between 25,000 to 35,000 to Vancouver's B.C. Place. IWA leader Jack Munro stated the potential of the movement in a speech that day. "This government has offended every decent and right-thinking person in this province." Hannah Jensen, former director of the Human Rights Commission, captured the spirit of the demonstrators and the television cameras when she cried from the podium, "Human rights are not for sale!" Unfortunately, the Solidarity coalition would be.

By August, there was constant media coverage of the growing movement. News commentators followed

moves by each side, competing for predictions and urging a spirit of cooperation. Columnists bounced from empathy with Solidarity to criticisms of its growing militancy.

By August, the anti-budget movement was reorganized, at times forcibly into the Solidarity movement, comprised of the Provincial Solidarity Coalition, Operation Solidarity (the union component in the coalition and major funding source for action) and tens of local coalitions. On July 27, 20,000 demonstrators filled the lawn in front of the legislature; on August 10, 45,000 overflowed the Empire Stadium in Vancouver. There were demonstrations in smaller communities. On October 15, there were 60-80,000 people circling the Hotel Vancouver, shouting "General strike! General strike!" to the Socred convention meeting within the hotel.

Despite massive differences between the top union leadership, progressive union leaders, rank and filers and community groups, these were heady days, as thousands of newly politicized people 'spoke out', as feminist slogans became popular ideas and the province moved to the brink of a general strike — a strategy openly debated within the Solidarity movement. At it turned out, it was not the Socred budget that was to lead to isolation, depression and a sense of defeat, but rather betrayal by the leadership of the B.C. labour movement.

On November 1, the B.C. Government Employees' union struck to achieve a contract. All major sectors of the B.C. union movement geared up to walk out in a planned series of strike waves, leading to a full general strike. On November 15, teachers, education support staff, community college instructors and many faculty and students at university campuses joined the picket lines. Later that week, workers at several crown corporations struck, with escalating strike action planned for the following week. It was at this point that the Operation Solidarity leadership and the B.C. government "settled". —Sara Diamond

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WOMEN AGAINST THE BUDGET (WAB) ORGANIZED A SUCCESSFUL AND EFFECTIVE 'PICNIC' AT 'HUMAN RESOURCES' MINISTER, MCCARTHY'S HOUSE



YOU DON'T FOLD WITH A WINNING HAND

THE B.C. SOLIDARITY SELLOUT

IF THE SOCIAL CREDIT BUDGET AND LEGISLATION managed to ruin most people's summer in British Columbia, then Operation Solidarity (the Union component of Solidarity) managed to take the joy out of the so-called festive season. The difference is that it hurts a lot more when the turkeys are on our side of the class line.

SUSAN CROLL

THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT members of the Operation Solidarity (OpSol) steering committee sold out. They sold out on behalf of their own membership and they sold the community groups very short. Top labour leadership in general and in B.C. specifically, is very bureaucratized and intimately linked to the social democratic politics and non-strategies of the NDP. Most of us who are critical and oppose the wheelings and dealings of the leadership expected a sellout of some sort. Nevertheless, because of the momentum of the Solidarity and anti-budget movement, the process and terms of the agreement struck in Kelowna, left us shocked and demoralized.

The Kelowna agreement consisted of the President of the International Woodworkers of America (B.C.) flying to the Premier's home in a private jet to discuss the terms of the "settlement". This was done without any consultation with any of the community groups that were the backbone of the coalitions. The agreement was unsigned, there were no witnesses present. Any shop steward knows you never talk to the boss alone unless you

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like to be doublecrossed! The terms of the agreement were fairly vacant: submissions to the '84 budget would be considered; an outside advisory committee would hear reports on human rights; the same for proposed amendments to the labour code; there would be no reprisals against groups or persons involved in either Solidarity or the strike.

The Solidarity movement had so much potential! The coalitions grew quickly and were active in every major community in B.C. Demonstrations



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differed in make-up from Vancouver's huge anti-nuke demos in that there were so many working and poor people present, and in the feeling of working class solidarity. It was exciting, but there were foreseeable problems and obstacles.

PROBLEM NUMBER ONE: The formal organizational and political split between OpSol and the Solidarity Coalitions. While agreeing in principle with labour autonomy — i.e., for unions and workers to develop policy, strategy, to coordinate job action in our own unions and with other unions — it is sometimes necessary to go beyond this framework. The B.C. situation called for such a step. Both unions and community groups were fighting a common battle and it was political suicide for community groups and unions to work independently. Resolutions from the Lower Mainland Solidarity Coalition (LMSC) called for joint committees of labour and community groups to plan action together, to raise concerns community groups had in terms of their constituencies, etc. Such committees never got off the ground. This resulted in a failure to reach good working, consistent, or democratic partnerships between OpSol and the coalitions.

In the smaller centres and towns throughout the province, the problem was somewhat different. It was more likely that unions and community groups met under one umbrella. They had communications problems with Vancouver. Without input into decision making and strategies, it became a rerun of "follow the leader". However, rural areas and smaller cities were still able to maintain a high profile, hold rallies and build Solidarity in their areas. In our area, many union locals (especially in the private sector) did not see the need to send reps to the LMSC since their union was already affiliated to OpSol. Consequently the strategy was divided. The top guns in labour knew what the consequences of this OpSol/SolCol split would be. They knew that the coalitions did not have the political power by themselves to be effective in defeating the budget and

WOULD IT MEAN A SNAP ELECTION, INCREDIBLE ANTI-STRIKE LEGISLATION, JAILINGS OF LABOUR LEADERS?

the accompanying legislation. The community groups needed the union's clout to win demands pertaining to the social issues.

It became clearer to many people as the fight went on that job action, including a general strike, was the route to go for both labour and community groups to win. The October 15th demo in Vancouver drew 65,000 or more people (OpSol said we'd be lucky to see 5,000) and the "general strike" was an underlying theme of the demo. Solidarity was a contagious people's movement!

However, we were beginning to get double messages from both OpSol and the B.C. Federation of Labour. Lip service was continuously given to issues of human rights, education, etc., and for the restoration of social services, but strategies were never put forward. The LMSC passed a resolution supporting job action up to and including a general strike in support of demands that the legislation and budget be withdrawn and social services be restored.¹ Mike Kramer, vice president of the BCFL, who attended this meeting, spoke against the resolution, stating that the BCGEU was going out for a contract which would include the fight against Bills 2 and 3. This by itself was fair enough — one union alone can't be expected to fight everything the government had brought down.

However, a vote against the resolution was also a vote against the concept of a full-fledged general strike.

The BCGEU went out on strike at midnight on October 31st. By this time OpSol had developed a plan of action which consisted of escalating job action in the public and education sectors over a staggered period of time. The private sector unions were to go out if there were any reprisals against the unions involved in job action. Again, people's hopes and desires rose. Art Kube, president of the BCFL spoke incessantly of the ante going up. Mike Kramer warned the government of the rising stakes of poker. For each union sector joining the strike there were to be additional demands on the table. As

the strike escalated, there was massive (including non-union) public support. **PROBLEM NUMBER TWO:** Someone should teach those boys how to play poker; you don't fold with a winning hand. If there was such widespread support for the BCGEU and the education sector strike, which the majority of the public saw and understood as a political strike, why was the rug pulled out from under our feet? First of all, the week by week escalating job action strategy of the BCFL and OpSol was inadequate and yet very calculated. It bought the



MARCHING INTO EMPIRE STADIUM
ON AUGUST 10TH DAY OF PROTEST

Socreds time to offer a deal. The staggered strike concept prolonged the battle and also meant that some unions would be out longer than others. With the holiday season around the corner many people saw this strategy as unfeasible. Without the proper political education, the consequences of economic hardship before the Christmas season cannot be glossed over when we're talking about the struggles of working people in North America. The BCFL also knew that they had to flex their muscle in light of the Socreds' proposed amendments to the labour code. These amendments, if passed, have the potential of putting labour law back into the 19th century — seriously curtailing union rights. And then there was the BCGEU; they desperately needed a contract, and in order to achieve it

they would need help. For the union bureaucracy, a controlled show of strength was useful. But there was also the will of the people.

The successful October 15th demo had resulted in a televised fireside chat with the premier himself. OpSol could not have grabbed the olive branch offered by Bennett at that time. But, only a few weeks later, the Kelowna agreement achieved little more than this olive branch offering (along with an exemption of Bill 3 for the BCGEU and a few finer details of their contract).

OpSol was not prepared to really fight the government all the way, or to address the questions of what it meant politically to engage in a full fledged general strike. Would it mean a snap election, incredible anti-strike legislation, jailings of labour leaders? The NDP wasn't ready to take power or even conduct an election campaign without a leadership candidate and Solidarity wasn't prepared to form a provisional government!

The problem of bureaucracy is not one of personality. Some of them are tough guys à la Kramer style and some of them quack a lot, and some are more progressive or rhetorical than others, but the common thread that unites bureaucracy throughout the world is a willingness to collaborate with employers and government to preserve 'social peace' and their own positions. When the going gets tough the result is usually to make a deal, unless the rank and file are unable to prevent it. In B.C., the deal was to slow down the struggle, to take it out of the hands of the people, and to remove any vestiges of democracy from "serious" decision-making. It was also to wait four years for the next election. They refused to wage a political fight, instead adopting a limited framework of "economic, democratic and human rights". Their protest was against how the budget was implemented — that the Socreds had surpassed their elected mandate. The issue of restraint was never thoroughly challenged, and to some extent even accepted. And so, the fight remained in

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THE OLD SLOGAN, "DON'T MOURN, ORGANIZE!", HAS A RING OF TRUTH FOR SOLIDARITY MILITANTS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

the confines of social democratic economics, although the attack was part of a global economic crisis and internationally endorsed right-wing policies.

PROBLEM NUMBER THREE: The lack of an organized opposition inside the Solidarity movements. As much as a lot of us are active in our unions, women's organizations, community groups and the coalitions, good intentions by themselves weren't enough. Other than the Communist Party, whose role in the coalitions was questionable around certain key strategies such as the general strike, a consistent left opposition that included perspectives and a class struggle programme was largely absent. There were groups within the coalition that were able to win issues pertaining to equality and democracy within the coalition. But on the whole it was on the level of consciousness-raising and no group was really able to drive the wedge that was needed.

Women Against the Budget was one organization that had the ability to raise and win on some of the above issues; but because it and the women's community exist largely outside of the labour movement, we weren't much more than just a pressure group on OpSol. We did make them feel fairly uncomfortable though! Specifically we gained a voice and presence for women's liberation that included feminist speakers at demos and rallies. WAB was also not afraid to speak out against undemocratic manoeuvres but, like a lot of the community groups and the LMSC, were fairly powerless in actually providing the basis to effectively change the situation. That often meant we were reacting to the OpSol situation. The Provincial Solidarity Coalition (the umbrella organization that encompassed local coalitions throughout B.C.) also wasn't able to salvage the situation. It lacked the vitality and the left leanings of the LMSC.

Where does that leave us now? Can we turn the defeat around? It leaves us without a lot of the basic rights that we once had. The most important thing to

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remember about what happened this past summer and fall in B.C. is that it wasn't an abstract fight. As the time passes in relation to the highly publicized crisis-oriented organising and reporting, it's necessary to bring the issues back into view and realize that people are hurting from the measures that the government brought down.

To date, the government and their allies haven't backed off. There have been massive fare increases on the ferries, rent increases, cutbacks in education and huge tuition fee increases at



45,000 DEMONSTRATORS IN EMPIRE
STADIUM GAVE THE NEW MOVE-
MENT EVEN GREATER CREDIBILITY

the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University. The David Thompson University in the Kootenays has been closed. The government is also aiming to privatize various parts of the Corrections Ministry. The BCGEU is also directly affected by these privatizations as it is their members who work in these departments. To top it off, the government is planning to bring down another budget this spring, and they have claimed that this time they will aim at cutting back social services! What do they think they did in the last round?

The next thing to assess is where the coalitions are at. It's only natural to feel depressed after you've been sold out or waged a fight and got smashed. Can we revitalize and repoliticize in '84? A human rights' demo in December managed to bring out only 500 people. The attendance and en-

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thusiasm at coalition meetings is lacking. But, it won't happen by trying to churn out action for the sake of action. It won't happen by saying we need a cross union rank and file grouping to take on the bureaucracy because such statements are pretty vague and hard to achieve without a lot of hard work.

We should come to terms with what we are able to achieve in relation to what our numbers and our strengths are. We could begin to analyze the current political situation, and put forward social and economic alternatives. This process could be democratic and include province-wide participation, through a real "peoples" commission. (A plan along these lines is more ideological, but ideology can never be underestimated. There is life beyond capitalism.) We need to realize what issues we can fight on and win on.

If Project Wolf can stop or postpone the slaughter of wolves in B.C., surely we can build enough support to prevent cutbacks in social services. A victory in one area of the social services may be what we need to begin revitalizing the coalitions again. We have to have the perspective of repairing the community group/union split. The women's movement has the potential to bridge that gap, if we are able to include in our demands and actions, issues that relate to working women. Union women also have to take up the issues outside of the trade union arena.

It's a hard job ahead of us, but we don't have a lot of choice when we're being hit from all sides. The old slogan: "Don't mourn, organize" has a ring of truth for solidarity militants in British Columbia.

¹ AT this time the B.C. Government Employees Union was ready to go out. Their main goal was to defeat Bills 2 and 3 which would severely damage seniority and collective bargaining rights in the public sector.

Susan Croll is active in the Telecommunications Workers Union of B.C. — serving on the executive of the operators' local. She is a member of Women Against the Budget, representing women on the steering committee of the Provincial Solidarity Coalition.

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GETTING UP THE SOCREDS NOSES

CULTURAL WORKERS IN SOLIDARITY

DURING THE FOUR MONTHS OF POLITICAL turmoil in British Columbia, a great cacophony of sounds and images confronted citizens of the province, each day. There was a lot of clutter on the broadcast air waves. In the papers millions of words were arranged and rearranged in often futile attempts to describe and explain the nature of the political crisis. Indeed, it was an historic moment and most official, mediated versions of events managed to indicate this. But as usual, the ideological bias of the mass media (both in content and technique) obscured the cultural meanings actually made by the thousands of participants in the Solidarity movement.

CHRIS CREIGHTON-KELLY

THE BUREAUCRATIC NATURE OF Operation Solidarity tended to encourage straightforward, fairly rigid events. For example, at the huge (40,000 persons) August 10th rally, various unions and community groups paraded their banners around the Empire Stadium track. Thousands in

the stands responded with spontaneous and sustained applause. Meanwhile, the speakers on the stage (too many) continued with their speeches (too long) as the political energy of the crowd dissipated. By the end, 80 percent of the people had left. In response, a group of musicians,

artists, writers, technicians and theatre people organized themselves with the hope of having input into Solidarity events — rallies, meetings, posters. Later to be named *Cultural Workers Against the Budget* (C.W.A.B.), they decided on four objectives:

1. To promote culture as an agent of opposition to the proposed legislation
2. To broaden the Solidarity Coalition through the inclusion of full time cultural groups
3. To attract and encourage participation of the public in the activities of the Solidarity Coalition
4. To ensure that the issues of spectacle and participation are addressed in planning Solidarity Coalition activities

Jon Bartlett, a striking teacher and performing folk singer, was chosen as the C.W.A.B. delegate to the Solidarity Coalition. He suggests three of these aims were partially met. However, he explains, "We've yet to attract full time cultural workers. Many have told us they support what we're doing, but they won't come out in a big way because they're afraid they'll lose government funding." But Bartlett regards this as only a partial answer; he continues, "Most of these professional artists do not regard themselves as workers. Instead they have another view of culture — starve, work, and wait for the Hollywood contract."

In this sense, "professional" cultural practioners isolate themselves both in their work and in their life. Within the autonomous, timeless discourse of high C art, music and theatre, the abstracted past becomes the referent point for "politics". While in their lives, artists are encouraged to remain aloof from mere politics — from such a perspective, cultural activities should be concerned with more refined, less mundane activities.

Lorraine Helgerson, one of the 1600 Ministry of Human Resources government workers threatened with firing and herself a musician, recalls, "It was a real eye-opener for people to see local musicians and actors performing and performing *well* about issues that were important to them. Many times people at work would ask, 'Were you the one singing at the rallies?' I realized how important it was to them that I was a

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VANCOUVER'S OWN INTERMINABLE POST-PUNKS DOA RECORDED THEIR NEW SINGLE 'GENERAL STRIKE'

fellow worker, not some star imported to sing politically correct songs."

This sense of an integrated cultural practice was evident throughout the Solidarity fightback. As a result of C.W.A.B.'s efforts, many songs were written and re-written to be sung by thousands at rallies and demonstrations. Also, graphic artists worked around the clock to produce posters for the many events.

Cultural Workers Against the Budget were a type of organized opposition to the Social Credit legislation. Other vital, more direct forms were also evident — buttons (If the Socreds get up your nose, picket), bumper stickers (one Socred budget can ruin your whole life) and graffiti (Bill Bennett made me eat my dog). The Emily Carr College art students and faculty shut down the school and led a noisy, colourful, *Students for Solidarity* parade. Clowns, theatre groups and singers surfaced for one-time impromptu harangues against the government. Vancouver's own interminable postpunks, DOA, recorded their new single, "General Strike". Homemade placards (Who needs human rights if you're rich?) and

costumes (Adolf Bennett) proliferated.

Ultimately, the role of artists became an active one — both reflecting and articulating the frustration of a very popular political movement. It was widely acknowledged that the participation of cultural workers planning events increased the level of spectacle and public involvement. Yet it was precisely the rhetorical nature of most of the work that prompted criticism from some of C.W.A.B.'s more reflective members. Most presentations were clearly ideological — artful propaganda from caricature to satire to agit-prop. They spoke distinctly of an

LIVING IN FEAR

Allen/Creighton-Kelly

What can we do if we don't have the money?
What can we do if we don't have a job?
What can we do livin on welfare?
Time for a change

What do we do, what do we do
We're living in fear (2X)
Everyday someone is victimized
Everyday some's getting rich
Everyday people's lives get harder
Time for a change

Everyday, Everyday,
We're living in fear (2X)

LANDLORD

to the tune of "Gloria"

Talking bout this problem
I've got with my home
My rent is increasing
But I know I'm not alone

I come home to my room
Most of my money's been spent
But it's the first of the month
And he's coming for the rent

He comes around here
Sometimes at night
Makes me feel so bad
Makes me feel uptight

Chorus:
And his name is L-A-N-D-L-O-R-D
Landlord
Landlord

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BILLY BENNETT

(to tune of "Frere Jacques")

Billy Bennett, Billy Bennett,
Where are you? Where are you?
We all think your phoney
Budget is baloney
Toodle-loo, toodle-loo.

Grace McBonkers, Grace McBonkers,
Where are you? Where are you?
You're a damn dictator
Human rights cremator
Toodle-loo, toodle-loo.

(Similarly):
Jimmy Matkin...
You and all the bosses
Gonna count your losses

Michael Walker...
Pinochet's your hero
You're a little Nero

gles. Official versions (both from the mass media and the union bureaucracy) of history and events are now being sanctified as to how and why Solidarity happened. There are of course, many other versions of history. Socio/cultural versions that include the ambiguities, the contradictions, the illusions. Perhaps even versions that include learning from our past mistakes. Instead of old, stale answers, perhaps new, radical questions.

If the personal is indeed political, then the political is also personal. History must also encompass a social reality that is not merely ideological or systemic. This reality includes the cultural practice of the politics of everyday life. Who better to address it than artists, musicians, writers and actors — people whose lives were affected by political struggle?

Chris Creighton-Kelly is a Vancouver video artist and instructor. He is active in *Cultural Workers Against the Budget* — a component of the Solidarity Coalition, and participated in *The Evictims* — an anti-budget rock band.

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GRAPHIC BY CLAIRE KUJUNDZIC FOR WAB ORGANIZING HANDOUT

FUSE

THE PRICE OF POLITICAL POKER

GAMBLING ON SOLIDARITY

A MULTI-MEDIA INSTALLATION BY VANCOUVER video artist Chris Creighton-Kelly, entitled *The Price of Poker: Gambling on Solidarity*, ran for two weeks at the Unit Pitt Gallery in Vancouver. Combining conceptual art and documentary, Creighton-Kelly employed the materials generated by the B.C. Solidarity movement, media clips and satirical commentary in order to reveal the dynamics within the province's strike wave of November, 1983.

SARA DIAMOND

THE TAPE RECORDED VOICE OF B.C. labour leader Mike Kramer, stating that the price of poker will go up on November 1st, greets the viewer entering the enclosed white space of the installation. Henceforth, there is a media bombardment which recreates the intense feelings of the weeks

leading up to and during the general strike. All of the major visible forces are present in the room: the government, trade union leadership, Solidarity activists, and media.

The communiqués, motions, press and leaflets of the movement are captured in plastic museum display bags

INSTALLATION SHOT OF CREIGHTON-KELLY'S *THE PRICE OF POKER*



on one wall. The synthesized debate, represented by political buttons is enclosed on another wall. Neatly organized poker hands fill yet another. A T.V. plays a video loop of the mass media's interpretations of Solidarity events. On a facing wall are interviews with Solidarity militants, each responding to the question: "How did you feel when the strike was called off?" The unedited interviews, shot in real time, against a stark background, provide an implicit critique of television "news" replete with its array of experts (Premier Bennett, Employer's Council of B.C., the top union leadership...). A graffiti commentary by the artist surrounds all the displayed items, providing both an informative context and interpretation. The museum-like environment allows a sense of distancing and contemplation, yet its construction imposes an intensive debate between all of those mediating between the government and those affected by its budget.

Absent from the installation are the base and periphery of Solidarity, the thousands who filled the ranks of demonstrations, or leafletted in their community, many of whom had made the first conscious political commitment of their lifetime. A broader video survey could have afforded the opinions of housewives, students, rank and file public sector workers, non-striking workers, older people, etc. — all affected by the strike and the legislation. The piece is limited to those engaged in moving Solidarity in one direction or another. Even activists, who were ultimately removed from the exercise of power, did play a key role in pressing Solidarity into strike action. In that it provides an articulate critique of the movement from the inside, it is a valuable piece of work, but it might well place the less politicized viewer between positions, rather than providing a place of identification.

Creighton-Kelly structures a powerful and emotional opportunity to relive the Solidarity experience; to ponder why a union leadership, faced with a unified and growing strike wave, massive public empathy and a bluffing government, blew the winning hand. The voices and faces of Solidarity activists defy the notion that politics is a game. The demoraliz-

THE SOCREDS ARE PREPARING A 1984 BUDGET WHICH WILL MAKE JULY 7TH LOOK LIKE ICE-CREAM

ing impact of betrayal and defeat are unmistakable. As one viewer (a teacher) commented:

We were together. We were determined to stay out until we gained our central demand: protection for quality education. This display underlines the sadness we all experienced. We went out and gained little or nothing.

The use of an art context to unravel an historical moment exposes the feel as well as the functioning of politics. Solidarity was so vivid in B.C. that this piece has appealed to an audience beyond that of the usual gallery installation. It has received extensive media



CREIGHTON-KELLY IN ACTION AT WAB'S PICNIC AT GRACIE'S

coverage, perhaps because it comments on a self-conscious media, at a time when there is a virtual blackout on the continued efforts of Solidarity. Teachers, activists, and trade unionists (including Mike Kramer) have filed through. The attempt to understand a mass movement has been appreciated. While rooted in a specific context, there is, as one of the video subjects states, an almost universal lesson about entrenched leadership, government power, media and the explosive dynamics of power, which make this work accessible and valuable beyond the geographic boundaries of British Columbia.

—Sara Diamond

IS THERE LIFE AFTER KELOWNA? PREPARING FOR THE NEXT ROUND

SARA DIAMOND

THE QUESTION ON MANY OF OUR MINDS today in British Columbia, is: Is there life after Kelowna? The B.C. legislature is again sitting. Human Rights and rentals legislation have been cosmetically revised, in response to pressure from Solidarity, but not yet reintroduced to the House. Public sector unions have negotiated exemptions from Bill 3 (removing seniority and bargaining rights), but the majority of legislation is now on the books. Massive cutbacks are proceeding as planned.

In February, many social services went out for tender, that is, sale to the private sector, leaving a skeletal welfare distribution structure through the Ministry of Human Resources. Local and provincial Solidarity coalitions continue to meet, generally adopting the long-term perspectives favoured by the B.C. Federation of Labour and N.D.P.: education and electoral change. In the Vancouver area, groups such as *Women Against the Budget* (still alive and well) and the *Lower Mainland Solidarity Coalition*

are centering on the defense of social services, such as *Vancouver Transition House*, about to be "privatized" or eliminated.

The Socreds are preparing a 1984 budget which will make July 7th look like ice cream. They plan major revisions to Workers' Compensation, drastic cuts to the public sector and, according to Bennett, the elimination of many social services which, he feels, were scarcely touched by the 1983 offensive. This year promises a new Labour Code, which will include limitations on picketing, give the Cabinet the right to declare any strike illegal, ease decertification, eliminate the independent Labour Relations Board and restrict construction sector unionism.

The struggle has not ended. *FUSE* readers can assist by writing a letter of protest to Premier Bennett, Legislature, Victoria, B.C. demanding the continuation of *Transition House*, other social services, human right protection, or whatever most touches your concerns.

ALL YOURS?

BUY AN INCH, BUY AN ADMISSION
BUY A MEMBERSHIP, BUY STOCK
IN 'YOUR' NEW VANCOUVER ART GALLERY
AN 'UNOFFICIAL' HISTORY BY STEVE HARRIS

PROBABLY NO MORE USELESS PUBLIC INSTITUTION, USELESS RELATIVELY TO ITS COST, WAS EVER DEvised THAN THAT POPULAR IDEAL, THE CLASSICAL BUILDING OF A MUSEUM OF ART, FILLED WITH RARE AND COSTLY OBJECTS.

—John Cotton Dana, 1920

YOU SIT DOWN WITH YOUR coffee and the *Province* Sunday supplement, 9th October, "a special advertising feature" entitled "The new Vancouver Art Gallery: It's all yours!" Inside, articles with titles like "Vancouver now ready for giant step into art big leagues", "New facilities will hold major exhibitions", and "Artfully on the map" prepare you for the re-opening of the Gallery in its new (old) quarters, and tantalize you with possibilities. It's "all yours", and more gorgeous than ever. Nestled among the articles and advertisements inside is a map indicating the various galleries within the building: the Teck (Corp.) Gallery, the Rogers (B.C. Sugar) Gallery, the Farrell (B.C. Tel) Gallery, the Southam (*Province* and *Sun*) Gallery, the Ketcham (West Fraser Timber/Abitibi-Price) Gallery, two Longstaffe (Canadian Forest Products) Galleries, the VSE (Vancouver Stock Exchange!) Gallery, and the Foley (Powell River Co., now part of Mac-Blo) Gallery.

The *Province* supplement suggests more than it might care to about the attitudes prevalent in our new-old cultural institution:

1. It reveals, concretely in the dedication of its galleries, an unequal struc-

ture of the representation of interests. The Gallery too pays a price for those dedications.

2. "The key to the new gallery" says VAG director Rombout, "is its ability to function on many levels"; but what kind of plurality is VAG offering to the public? Gallery "plurality" has taken, in practice, different meanings at different times.

3. When the Gallery says that its opening show is a "tribute to local artists", one ought to look behind that statement, at VAG's actual conduct over the years with respect to local artists.

The Vancouver Art Gallery is a public institution; it was privately founded in 1931 by a group of wealthy businessmen who, while ceding its property, building and collection (and a considerable portion of its expenses) to the city in a public-spirited gesture, were able to ensure their hegemony on its Council for a very long time.

Though the founders were, for their time, as powerful as today's VAG Council members in the economic life of the nation, their cultural ambitions were modest; the Art Gallery functioned more as a culture club for the wealthy, and for their friends in the professional and artistic communities, than as a display of wealth and hubris

for others. Council literally ran VAG itself, and local artists furnished much of the material for its exhibitions.

In the early 1960s the premises on which Gallery policy was based began to be altered. The federal government's cultural role was greatly expanded in these years, part of the Pearson government's interventionist programme into the economic and social life of the country, which was intended to guarantee the expansion of the economy on a stable social base. Its cultural expenditure can be seen as another type of social welfare policy: the Canada Pension Plan and medicare were introduced, unemployment insurance increased, and cultural enrichment and higher education were open to all. That these latter were not taken advantage of by the majority did not matter so much as that the opportunity was seen to be there.

It was a programme that gained the support of significant sections of both business and labour — a legitimization of capitalism, which was expanding at this time and seemed able to provide for a stable welfare state, which in turn guaranteed the accumulation of capital. In 1965 the Canada Council, whose ambitions had extended beyond the limits of its endowment income, started receiving yearly appropriations from the government, and began its own large-scale intervention into Canadian cultural life.

Federal government funding changed VAG's policy in several ways. The dependence on local benefactors lessened, and the role of the VAG Council declined in the 1960s. The Gallery, with an increased budget, was able to redefine its role and audience. It

no longer functioned as a strictly civic gallery, as it began to reach national and international prominence in 1966 and 1967. The director hired in 1967, Tony Emery, built VAG's reputation on three policies:

- The first gathered attention both locally and abroad with a series of major shows from 1967 to 1971: *Arts of the Raven* (actually organized prior to Emery's arrival), L.A. 6 (1968), *New York 13* (1969), 955,000 (1970), and *Sculpture/Inuit* (1971). The exhibitions of contemporary American art were a series of catch-up shows recapitulating the influence of L.A. and New York art on the younger local artists, some of whom participated in the last major show of this type, 955,000 — an exhibition of conceptual and environmental installations found at the Gallery and in the city itself.

- The second was to exhibit a great deal of local art; he said (in 1973) that validation of local artists' reputations was his first responsibility. In addition to the usual retrospectives of established local artists, installations and performances were encouraged, and a series of small exhibitions of young artists begun. The annual *Directions* series, begun in 1966, was superseded by the *Exploratory Space* and *Alternate Space* series in 1973; the latter was organized by an independent artists' jury, to give exposure to unknown artists. This was in addition to a number of local group and thematic exhibitions.

- The third was to search for new audiences, for in Emery's terms "the 94% of the accessible population" who never set foot in VAG. This was attempted by several means: special

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NOT VAGUE ABOUT THE VAG: THE CULTURAL BANDITS OF B.C. AT THE OPENING OF THEIR NEW EXPANDED BUILDING

FIRST ROW (l. to r.): Sgt. Preston; Governor-General Ed Schreyer; VAG President Robert Brodie (a C.A. with Thorne Riddell; dir., Inland Natural Gas, Cardiff Estates). SECOND ROW (l. to r.): Vancouver Alderpersons Harry Rankin and May Brown; Van. Mayor Mike Harcourt; Senator Jack Austin. THIRD ROW (l. to r.): Peter Paul Saunders (chair. and pres., Versatile Corp. — 45% owned by Canfor; dir., Bralorne Resources, B.C. Broadcasting, Canfor Investments, Wajax, Bank of B.C., and Northwestern Sports Enterprises; mem., adv. bd.), National Trust Co.; dir., Diefenbaker Foundation, C.D. Howe Institute, Van. Symphony Soc., Van. Opera Ass'n., Can. Cancer Soc., Can. Ch'br. of Comm., and Van. Board of Trade); Morris Wosk (developer); Ethel McIntosh (wife of Buck McIntosh, partner, Lawson, Lundell, Lawson & McIntosh, lawyers; sec., Sandwell & Co. Forestry Consultants; dir., Bank of B.C.); Betsy Lane (former research chemist, Chalk River Project; member, Federal Cultural Policy Review C'ttee; ex-pres., Can. Conf. of the Arts; chair, Koerner Foundation); FOURTH ROW (l. to r.): Frank Murphy (lawyer, partner, Farris, Vaughan, Wills & Murphy; dir., Kelly Douglas, Mitsui Canada); Robert Annable (chair and chief executive office (CEO) Ancore Int'l, an import/export business; dir. Fed. Business Devel. Bank); John Davidson (pres., Connaught Holdings, chair, exec. c'ttee, Drummond Petroleum; chair, Can. Nat. Resources, Reed Stenhouse); Ann Cherniavsky (wife of Peter Cherniavsky, chair, pres. & CEO B.C. Sugar; dir., Placer Development — mining, Weyerhaeuser Canada); Bonar Lund (co-ordinating partner, Clarkson Gordon, a large C.A. firm). ...and that's only the tip of the corporate iceberg controlling the VAG.



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events at noon and in the evenings, including films, dance, theatre, performances, poetry readings and music (both popular and classical); by *Vanguard*, originally a monthly calendar of events; and by outreach programmes, including provincial tours, work with children, prisoners and the aged, a cable tv programme, and satellite galleries opened at successive sites in the East End. After 1970 this kind of activity was absorbing the bulk of the Gallery's energy, which had the potential to draw in new people but also to alienate the Gallery's "traditional" audience, that part of the bourgeoisie which had interested and involved itself in Gallery activity in its semi-professional phase.

VAG was cultivating the image of an "open" gallery, a place where anything

its values, which are precisely those of "freedom". But at the beginning of the 70s, the Gallery co-opted the local avant-garde with warmth and hospitality.

Emery had taken advantage of a contradiction in federal cultural policy, a potential conflict between the Canada Council's desire to encourage "excellence" (forever undefined), and the Secretary of State's goal of "democratization and decentralization" of cultural policy in order to promote both aspects of his programme — exhibitions and outreach. But the programmes initiated by the Gallery in the early 1970s alienated VAG's old audience and its Council.

The VAG Council, which was still formally responsible for the direction of the Gallery, was at first quite enthusiastic about Emery's efforts, especially the first part of his programme (the part still in effect in 1983); they offered him a five-year contract after the success of *New York 13*. VAG's retrospectives of recent American art could only be applauded by those collectors who sat on Council; but as the Gallery moved away

for education, extension and like programmes — ones which would "popularize" museums. At the same time, Canada Council funding was altered from flexible block grants to detailed accounting for programmes, subject to review and approval. The LIP-OFY (employment) programmes that had, for instance, supported the satellite galleries were ditched (though some individual projects were taken on by National Museums or the Council). The effect was to circumscribe the programmes of institutions like VAG; first the satellites and later special events were disposed of because their funding was rejected by these agencies.

At the same time the Canada Council was freezing its funding to established institutions, even before its own funding was frozen, and warned them that it expected business to contribute more to what was perceived as its own cultural territory. André Fortier, then-director of the Canada Council, said it was his ambition to transfer part of the role of the Council to private corporations, in order to free more monies for less-established groups and for regional programming. In 1974 the Canadian Council for Business and the Arts was founded with Canada Council assistance, another sign of the repatriation of culture to capital.

By 1974, it was clear that Emery's power had been undermined at its source, and several disgruntled trustees moved to oust him that summer. Emery had, said Ron Longstaffe² at the time, "a conscious plan to alienate people", and "almost poked the thumb at the wealthier group", "because he figured all the money would come from Canada Council." A very candid fellow, Longstaffe went on to say that "Canada Council has asked all groups to increase their support from the community because the council will be unable to handle expanded budgets." Which is indeed true: the Canada Council grant to VAG in 1981 (\$148,167) was actually less, in dollar value, than it was in 1972 (\$150,698). And so Luke Rombout Took the Gallery to Court.

Rombout was hired in 1975 as a fundraiser, a man who could motivate business and governments to contribute funds towards the reconstruction of the old Courthouse. The move there had been seriously considered since 1973,

and something was necessary in light of the cramped space of the old building.

The new Gallery was conceived as a place to which money and collections would flow, that is, as a place where business could demonstrate its generosity to the population. These donations would not be forthcoming until a new and better site were secured, so that the generosity would be adequately displayed.

The weekly tv programme was cancelled, to make way for an in-house video schedule. Education was made a strictly on-floor activity, a change which caused much bitterness. And in 1976, *Vanguard* was turned into a journal (cutting off the life-organs of *Criteria*, a quarterly insert into *Vanguard* with less explicit ties to the Gallery), and its publicity function extended outside the city's perimeters for the first time.

munity was, for a variety of reasons, alienated from the Gallery.

The old programmes were no longer "relevant", because there was no longer an audience for them, while the real audience, the one which hired him, had no longer felt comfortable at VAG, and had withdrawn both its monies and its services.

The new direction, by which one could make symbolic reparations to the "alienated" moneyed ones, posed no problems at all if one's duties to "the cutting edge" of art (a popular cliché in Emery's time) were no longer seen to apply. The rationale of the death of the avant-garde was used to justify both a return to the exhibition of traditional forms of object-making, and a move away from the exhibition of local artistic production. Rombout said in a 1979 interview:

I don't feel there is an avant-garde anymore. I hear a lot about the avant-garde in Vancouver, but not when I go to New York or Paris. I am absolutely firm in saying that this gallery will not be given over to local artists.

The re-orientation was first to objects, then to international "developments" in art, both of which corresponded to the ambitions and collections of Vancouver's business class — *New York 13* had served the same purpose in 1969. There was still some

REBUILT IN THE 50'S, THE EXPANDED VAG IS BEING RIPPED DOWN



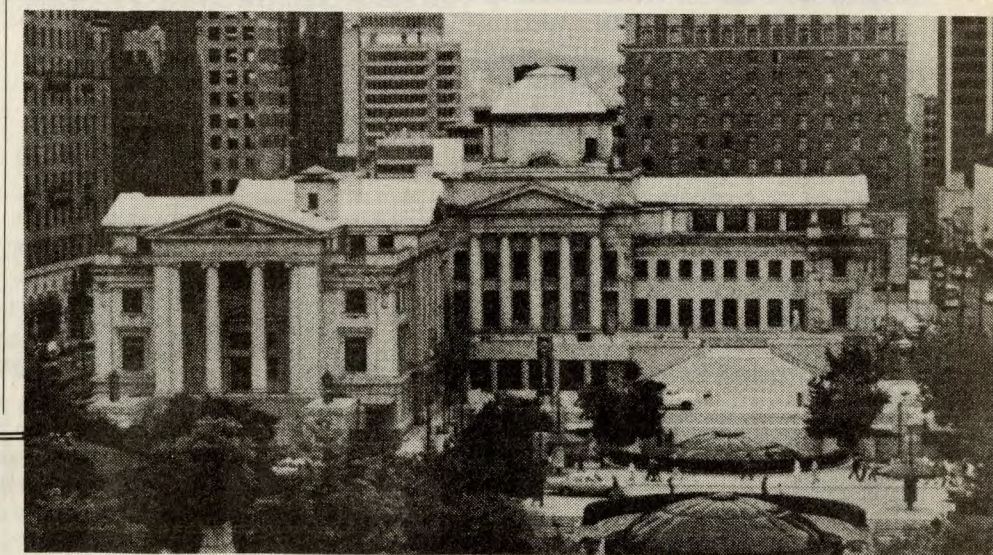
Rombout's changes, which soon eliminated all of Emery's programme save Extension (which has its own, more recent troubles), accompanied a general 'rationalization' and centralization of administration intended to reify business values in the Gallery. His campaign had several, linked aspects. Rombout re-identified VAG's audience, as Emery had done before him, so that he could bring the programme up to date; speaking of the policies preceding his own regime, and their failure, Rombout said in 1976:

Upon his arrival, Rombout quickly re-oriented VAG to the display of pictures, to the building of the permanent collection, which according to him (and to Longstaffe) had been neglected in the preceding period, and to in-house support of the exhibitions on view, especially in terms of catalogues and education.

Rombout's first move was to cancel the special events programme, which he has recently said was no longer relevant. A little later the two exhibition series for unknown or local experimental artists also disappeared: "The Alternate Space program has been scrapped", Rombout said at the time:

If a gallery is going to show an artist, it should stand behind him, treat him as a professional, mount his exhibition, prepare a catalogue, pay him a fee — take a more serious approach to his work. I think we can still give the unknowns as much of a chance as anyone.

THE NEWEST VAG HAS MORE ROOM FOR THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY TO FLEX ITS CORPORATE CULTURAL MUSCLES



THE FIRST VAG, 1931: A DECO CULTURE CLUB FOR THE WEALTHY

was possible and where all forms of experiment were practiced. It was, Emery said, a "people's gallery"; it was a place where dissent was given a positive caste. "Problems of the Museum of Contemporary Art in the West"¹ was an article which reflected discussions on the nature and purpose of galleries and described the predicament of the times (though it has since become a dead issue):

The museum has become more critical both of art and of itself, because it has become aware of its function outside daily life. It does indeed function outside the system, sets itself up in opposition to the Establishment, yet continually shows itself to be an instrument of the system. Like art it is a place of freedom, but of freedom which stops at the museum door.

Now, of course, museums no longer even entertain the illusion of opposition. They are quite proudly "instruments of the system", and objectify

from this type of exhibition and its programme centred more on workshops and events, there was friction between VAG Council and its director and staff.

Because, with the influx of federal funds, the fiscal balance of power rested with the director, not the VAG Council, and since VAG's programme was admired by government agencies, no serious conflict was possible. But in 1973-74, in the wake of the oil crisis, the federal government pulled back from many of its cultural commitments, while bureaucratizing others. Bernard Ostry, bureaucrat extraordinaire, wrote later that only the shell of "democratization and decentralization" remained in federal policy, and then only in the National Museums of Canada.

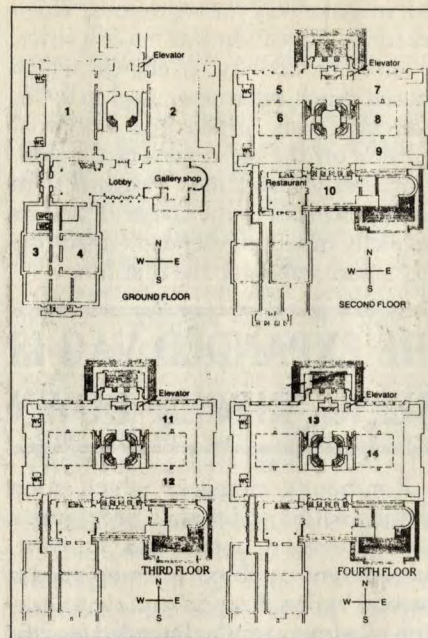
The National Museums Policy was announced in 1972 and established the next year; museums could apply for associate status and so receive funding

vitality to the programme when Alvin Balkind was head curator (1975-78), but since then it has moved, with a few exceptions, in the direction of a banalized multinational style, appropriate perhaps for West Van homes, but with little to teach Vancouver audiences. There has been a preponderance of artists from the Castelli-Christmas stable: Robert Rauschenberg, Frank Stella, Don Judd, Mia Westerlund, and most recently, Dennis Oppenheim, Ed Ruscha and Cy Twombly; and a smattering of ancient British figures, including Joe Tilson, Richard Hamilton and Geoff Smedley. One might mention the bird artist Fenwick Landsdowne, very popular with the public and with MacMillan-Bloedel. But aside from the odd challenging show like *Mise-en-Scène* (really a throwback to the Emery era) and *Mannerism*, the Gallery has been a very quiet place for the last five years, which is a long time to retain an interested audience.

Yet the Gallery has managed to generate an ingenuous popular appeal through spectacles like the Rauschenberg exhibition, the capital campaign, the buy-an-inch-of-Rauschenberg exercise, and the present hoopla around the re-opening. Nearly \$1 million of the \$5.2 million raised from the "private sector" during the capital campaign was from individual citizens. And now it looks like there will be over 20,000 new VAG memberships — whereas the old membership list never rose above 3,000. VAG is giving the people what it thinks they want, and the (bourgeois) masses are responding enthusiastically.

VAG's appeal in each case was to the "community": "It's all yours!" But its definition of community rests on its redefinition of audience undertaken after the ousting of Emery. Here is a sample definition from Sheldon Cherry, VAG Council president (1978-79), thanking people for their support of the capital campaign:

I refer here to a large cross section of people and organizations with a variety of interests and backgrounds — the public at large including children, foundations, corporations, large and small businesses, the professions, etc. — but all sharing a common vision of what a new Gallery in the heart of the city will mean for the citizens of British Columbia.



VAG GALLERY GUIDE TO CORPORATE IMAGE BOLSTERING

1. Emily Carr Gallery 2. MacMillan Bloedel Gallery 3. Orientation Room 4. Children's Gallery 5. Teck (Corp.) Gallery 6. Rogers (B.C. Sugar) Gallery 7. Farrell (B.C. Tel) Gallery 8. Southam (Province & Sun) Gallery 9. Ketcham (West Fraser Timber/Abitibi-Price) Gallery 10. Terrace 11. & 12. Longstaffe (Canadian Forest Products) Galleries 13. VSE (Vancouver Stock Exchange) Gallery 14. Foley (Powell River Co., now part of MacBlo) Gallery

Cherry may not have been aware, of course, that all of the groups on his list, excepting children, belong to the same narrow world he himself inhabits. But he seems to have forgotten those private citizens with their \$1 million contribution.

In a similar vein, Luke Rombout wrote in 1981:

I remain pessimistic about the ability of the three levels of government to increase cultural funding; the reality during the next years to come will be that those institutions which can successfully fundraise in the private sector are the ones that will survive in moderate health. It simply means that we have to earn, in every sense, our place in the community.

The "community" is collapsed into the world of business, which is now the desired base of financial support for the Gallery.

It is clear that since his arrival, Rombout has solicited a great deal of in-

terest and support from local capital, and the Gallery has been the recipient of numerous donations. The director has sought, and found, high-powered executives and professionals to sit on Council, ensuring that the domination of Vancouver's business elite is more thorough there than at any time since VAG's founding. The Gallery has been remade in the image of the corporation, with the introduction of "fundamental working procedures as practiced in business and industry around us", the transformation of the programme, and, finally, the dedication of the galleries inside the new VAG.

In the end, the Gallery offers itself up as a commodity: "buy-an-inch", buy an admission, buy a membership, buy our vision of what you want to see. This is its real relationship to the community: we sell you what you're going to want, we sell you our value system, we sell you the ideology embodied even in the structure and organization of our Gallery. "Making money is making sense", after all. And success is measured not in terms of programme quality, but by budgets and attendance, by the size of the permanent collection or by its sumptuous setting — corporate criteria have come to determine the programme.

The new Gallery is undoubtedly popular in this earliest phase of its rebirth, which seems to signal a new level of bourgeois self-confidence. A confidence which has encouraged the Socred government to mount its counter-attack on the working class and the poor in our province. If you were marching by the Socred conventioners in the recent Solidarity demonstration, you would have noticed their smug expressions, and the little VAG buttons decorating their lapels. It's "all theirs", though gorgeous enough.

Steve Harris is a student in the Fine Arts Programme of the University of British Columbia. A slightly longer version of this article appeared in the catalogue for the *October Show* — an alternate art show held concurrently with the VAG opening.

1. published in the UNESCO journal *Museum* (Volume 24, 1972).

2. of Canadian Forest Products; there are two Longstaffe galleries in the new VAG.

FREE LANCERS IN THE ARTS

JOANNE KATES & JANE SPRINGER

JOANNE KATES WAS THE FIRST PRESIDENT OF THE PERIODICAL Writers' Association of Canada (PWAC) which was established in 1976. Jane Springer was a founding member of the Freelance Editors Association of Canada (FEAC) which was set up in January 1979. Using their experience with these organizations as a base, they will, in this article, look at people who freelance in the arts and examine the organizations that they have formed. These organizations have developed out of two main areas of concern: efforts to improve wages and working conditions and attempts to organize around political issues that are related to culture.

An earlier version of this article appeared in *Union Sisters: Women in the Labour Movement*, a book edited by Linda Briskin and Lynda Yanz, which was released in 1983 by the Women's Press (Toronto).



THOSE WHO WORK FREELANCE IN THE AREA OF culture in Canada — as writers, artists, editors, poets, translators — face a unique set of problems. On the one hand, they have a valuable skill and considerable control over their working conditions. On the other hand, they are seldom paid for each hour they work, and because they work alone, they lack the benefits of a collective work space. Although some artists and writers achieve a measure of artistic autonomy, most work under the constraints of having to produce what will sell. Women confront the same problems of low wages and low status as in other areas of the labour force, but the freelance nature of their work has meant they have rarely been a target of unionizing attempts.

Our experiences in PWAC and FEAC raised serious doubts about the possibility of organizing freelancers into unions. It became clear that the actual organizing into advocacy groups was possible, and that such groups could flourish as professional service organizations. But we were thwarted in our desire to build unions; by and large the members of both PWAC and FEAC were not willing to put their energies into collective bargaining, even in order to deal with the narrowest of work area concerns. Broader, more "political" concerns, like the issues raised elsewhere by feminists and those suggested by the publishing industry — like censorship or the "motherhood" issue of Canadian content — have scarcely been considered.

THESE ORGANIZATIONS DO NOT BARGAIN COLLECTIVELY, THEY DO NOT GO OUT ON STRIKE OR EVEN THREATEN TO STRIKE THOSE WHO PAY THEM

Freelance Work Areas and their Organizations

WHEN WE BEGAN TO STUDY THE OTHER freelancers' organizations it was obvious that all of them shared the same difficulties in terms of organizing and political action. In addition to PWAC and FEAC, there are five other organizations defined by their field or work area that represent freelance cultural workers in Canada. They are, in the order of their founding, the League of Canadian Poets, Canadian Artists' Representation (CAR), The Writers' Union of Canada (TWUC), the Guild of Canadian Playwrights and the Literary Translators' Association (LTA). (See table for comparative statistics on all of the organizations.)

From the founding of the League of Canadian Poets in 1967 to FEAC's birth in 1979, the organizations have developed along similar lines. The only two of them that do not generate the majority of their operating funds from government grants are FEAC and LTA. For all the others, most income comes from government arts granting agencies like the Canada Council and provincial arts councils.

Unlike most trade unions, which have the freedom to determine their own goals because they generate all their income through membership dues, these organizations are influenced by outside forces. Government funding allows five of these organizations to run secretariats (offices with executive directors and clerical staff) that lobby and provide information to their members, but it also acts as a powerful constraint that imposes a certain structure on the organizations, forcing them to operate in set ways. In order to fit arts council criteria for funding, and also in order to avoid making funding bodies nervous, the organizations create programs of a *service* nature (i.e.: the Canada Council is willing to pay for cultural events — like reading tours — and professional development events — like seminars — but will not fund a secretariat's general operating expenses). This influences organizations to tailor their goals to meet funding criteria, making it difficult for them to put priority on collective bargaining, even if they wished to do so.

Another important reason why these organizations have resisted collective bargaining is the marginality of the Canadian culture industries. In some areas of Canadian cultural production so little money is being spent and earned that books, for example, might not get published if authors bargained for a living wage. Except in the case of extremely popular products, the production of culture is

rarely very profitable, and that economic marginality makes it hard to pressure company owners for a better deal for workers — especially in Canada, where the small population makes culture even less profitable than in countries like the U.S.A.

The other kind of marginality that affects cultural workers and their organizations has to do with the idea (shared by them and the people who consume their work) that culture is not an essential product. Although the production of ideas has a powerful effect on people's lives, culture is not considered in the same way as cars or clothing. Even many cultural workers believe that the work they do is not important to anybody but themselves. This lack of awareness of how important they are makes them shrink from militance because, fundamentally, they don't think anybody would notice if they were to withdraw their services or use the other persuasive tools employed by trade unions.

And so these organizations function mostly as service groups to provide information and individual benefits to their members. When it comes to collective bargaining, which is, after all, the foundation of a union, the organizations have a weak history. Only three of them have made serious attempts at collective bargaining. Of the three, one has failed completely, one, CAR, has signed contracts with only a few sympathetic employers and PWAC has seen its contracts fall into disuse.

In June 1982, the Ontario local of CAR succeeded in negotiating an artist/gallery agreement with all publicly funded galleries in Ontario. This is a major victory, and an international first for visual artists, but bargaining with private galleries will be much more difficult.

As for the other organizations, the collective bargaining story is even more disheartening. In the fall of 1982 the Guild of Canadian Playwrights presented a contract to theatres in Canada that would have granted playwrights a ten percent share of any weekly box office gross receipts and more control over artistic decisions, such as the choice of director, designer and cast. The contract was good but the theatres turned it down flat and the Guild membership was unwilling to strike. The experience of the Writers' Union in trying to bargain for a good author/publisher contract has been the same.

Although the Writers' Union calls itself a union, and all the organizations have as their stated goals the idea of improving the working lives of their members, not one of them is really a union. If it does nothing else, a union bargains collectively for its members, and uses (or threatens to use) the clout created by withdrawal of services to give that bargaining some power. These organizations do not bargain collectively; they do not go on strike or even

threaten to strike those who pay them.

At first glance, another difference between these organizations and most Canadian unions is the heavy participation of women in them. The average female membership in the seven organizations is 47 percent, and the leadership is made up of an average of 48 percent women. That is a rare and impressive example of female participation and leadership, but women nonetheless suffer from many of the same problems in cultural organizing as in other kinds of organizing. As in other work areas, women are substantially economically disadvantaged in cultural work. According to a recent Canadian study, full-time women writers earn an average of 53 percent of what full-time men writers earn. And yet the organizations have done nothing to combat this discrimination against women.

The same problem exists *inside* the organizations. It is true that women constitute almost half the leadership of most of the organizations, but they also tend to do most of the work, both on a paid and volunteer basis. The paid secretaries and directors who keep the offices running are mostly women, probably because men would refuse to work for such low pay. And the volunteers who keep the committees going, which in turn are the lifeblood of any such organization, are by and large women. That is a reflection of the volunteer syndrome we see so often in our society, in which women do essential work on a volunteer



Seven Cultural Work Area Organizations

Organization	Founded	Total Members	No. & % of Women Members	No. & % of Men Members	Percent of Women in Leadership	Annual Dues	% Self Funded	% Government Funded	Collective Bargaining	Sources of Income from Work Area	Average Earnings From Work
League of Poets	1967	240	91 38%	149 62%	25	\$100	15-20	75-80	no	royalties, advances (rare), reading tours,	\$2,500
CAR	1968	500-600	50%	50%	50	\$40	20-30	70-80	yes	sales, commissions, exhibition fees, rentals, reproductions	\$4,500
TWUC	1973	364	163 45%	201 55%	41	\$150	49	51	no	royalties, advances, reading tours	median \$7,000
ATL/LTA	1975	57	24 42%	33 58%	20	min. \$25 max. \$60	50	50	no	contract per book (based on Canada Council rates of \$.07a word)	?(negligible)
Guild of Playwrights	1976	95	25 26%	70 74%	50	min. \$25 max. \$150	12	88	yes	% of box office receipts of plays, commissions	\$2,200
PWAC	1976	200	110 55%	90 45%	80	\$115	30	70	yes	per article contract (based on No. of words)	\$13,480
FEAC	1979	60	46 77%	14 23%	78	\$75	100	0	no	contract per book (normally based on hourly rate)	\$12,000
Total			48%	52%	49%						

THEY SEE WOMEN'S CAUCUSES AS A THREAT TO THEIR PROFESSIONAL STATUS, AND THUS IN CONFLICT WITH WHO THEY ARE AND WHAT THEY DO

basis, because no one is willing to pay for it to be done and men won't work for free.

So here we have a work area like other work areas, where women work as hard as men (or harder) and earn less money. In the face of that obvious discrimination, women in trade unions have responded by creating women's caucuses to fight for a fair deal for women. And yet these organizations have on the whole chosen to ignore the discrimination. Of all seven organizations, only one, the League of Canadian Poets, has such a caucus; and when the League inaugurated its Feminist Caucus in 1982, some members resigned in outrage. They were furious because membership in the League (and the ability to publish poetry at all) is based on standards of artistic excellence, and they feared that programs like affirmative action for women would substitute quotas for standards of excellence as selection criteria.

In general, the reaction of some of the outraged members of the League of Canadian Poets to the Feminist Caucus has reflected more general attitudes in all the organizations. They are all hobbled in their ability to fight for women by this fear of an abandonment of standards of excellence. In a work area where women are still earning half of what men earn doing the same work, it is clear that the organizations need women's caucuses. The recent history in trade unions shows that initiatives to improve women's incomes come from women's caucuses, and that before such caucuses form, little is said or done about the oppression of women. It would be not only useful but possible for these organizations to create women's caucuses, but here too they are dragging their feet because of a reluctance to identify with the women's and/or union movements. They see women's caucuses as a threat to their professional status, and thus in conflict with who they are and what they do.

The Specific Problems of Organizing Freelancers

THIS NOTION OF HOW ARTS FREELANCERS SEE themselves is crucial. The problems of organizing them exist on this level, the level of their consciousness, as well as on the more concrete levels that we have already discussed.

In a plant, in an office, even in a farm field where crops are being harvested, a worker looks over her shoulder a hundred times a day and she knows: "these people are my co-workers." In contrast, freelance writers, visual artists, translators, editors, playwrights and poets, because they

work alone, completely separate from one another, don't have that chance to identify with each other. If one of us writes a book published by McClelland and Stewart, we do not think of ourselves as Pierre Burton's co-worker. The isolation that freelancers experience has a profound effect. The immediate physical conditions for identifying with each other as working people do not exist.

Part of what keeps cultural workers from fighting for what they could win is their *feeling* of marginality, and this is especially true of women. At least half of Canadian cultural workers are women. According to a recent Canadian study, 42 percent of all Canadian freelance writers are women. Given that Brian Harrison, author of the study, only polled members of writers' organizations (which charge an average \$100 annual fee that many women can ill afford), we can safely assume that the proportion of women writers is even higher than he found. So many women do freelance cultural work because of its very marginal nature: it's what they can get. No employer is bound to give them job security or benefits like health insurance, vacation pay, pension plans or unemployment insurance contributions, or even a desk in an office. The work takes place in one's home and it requires little support from the employer. These are qualities that cultural work shares with some female job ghettos: the sporadic, home-centred nature of the work makes it more difficult and yet also more possible for women with child care responsibilities.

The feeling of marginality is a powerful internalized weapon for keeping people from being active in their own interests, and that feeling is exacerbated among women cultural workers by their economic marginality. Recent figures show that women get 28 percent of Canada Council writing grants and 33 percent of theatre grants. From 1978 to 1981 only 29 percent of Canadian writers in residence at universities were women. Women account for 28 percent of publication space in Canadian literary magazines and 7 percent of the poems published in anthologies.

The battle has yet to begin. Katherine Anne Porter, speaking on why it took her twenty years to write *Ship of Fools* when she could have done it in two, said she was "trying to get to that table, to that typewriter, away from my jobs of teaching and trooping this country and of keeping house." Before a woman writes a play, a poem, or a book, or paints a picture or translates a novel, she must contend with a problem that few men face: the double day of labour. And that problem is as inextricably intertwined with her ability to organize as it is with her ability to create.

Writers and artists function as independent producers who must compete with each other in a tight economy to market their work. We've grown up with certain basic

Case Histories in False Consciousness

PERIODICAL WRITERS' ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

SIXTY PEOPLE JOINED PWAC AT ITS founding meeting in May 1976 and by 1980 there were two hundred members. Membership was based on a point system that demonstrated a person's experience in writing for financial remuneration for mass market Canadian magazines and newspapers. From the beginning PWAC brought together the majority of Canada's successful freelance writers.

PWAC's goal was to create better working conditions for freelance writers. They wrote a contract to govern the transactions between writers and magazine and newspaper editors that included a number of strong protections for writers: a fifty percent "kill fee" (to be paid if an assigned article is not used), the right to see all edited copy and negotiate edits while there is still time to make changes, payment within two weeks of acceptance, and no major rewrites that deviate from the initial outline unless an extra fee is paid. The PWAC contract was an excellent one; it included unheard of protection for writers. The kill fee clause, for example, was completely new in Canada at the time. PWAC negotiated the contract with editors and nineteen Canadian magazines signed it. The commitment to the collective bargaining process was so strong that PWAC twice threatened strike action — once against *Weekend* magazine and then against *Chatelaine*. A strong grievance committee that supported writers who were being maltreated by magazines won most of its battles.

By 1980 the original leadership was tired, and most of the people in it stepped down. But it was more than fatigue that caused so many to retire. *The Body Politic*, a newspaper of gay liberation, was facing a trial on obscenity charges. Some people thought an organization of freelance writers should support a minority newspaper under attack, in the name of the fight against censorship. They were overruled by a majority who felt that taking a stand on an issue like censorship was too "political" for the organization.

As soon as the original executive retired from active participation, the character of PWAC changed. Now there is no talk of strikes at annual meetings. Buying computers is a hotter topic than bargaining collectively. The style of the organization is more service-oriented, with a stress on professional development seminars, discounts on office supplies for Toronto members and a group

disability insurance plan. The goals of collective bargaining have ceased to be a priority. People had wanted better wages and working conditions and the contract that would ensure this, but they did not want to call the organization a union or to be identified with union practices.

The Body Politic incident also indicated that issues not directly related to the economic concerns of freelance writers are not part of PWAC's agenda. "Women's issues" are also concerns that are outside the organization's scope. Although women have always dominated the membership and are the majority of the executive of PWAC, there has never been a discussion of the disadvantaged position of women in the field.

FREELANCE EDITORS ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

FREELANCE EDITORS WORK ON A contract basis with publishers, sometimes at an hourly rate, sometimes per manuscript. Although in some of the work that freelance editors do they appear to be in a business relationship between two equals, much of it is for large, often multinational companies that view them as skilled workers, not professionals. Freelancers are cheaper than full-time in-house people who are paid for regular office hours and get benefits. They provide fast service and no overhead cost. They have some control over their time and working conditions, but essentially they do what publishers ask them to, when they're asked to do it. In other words, freelance editors are more often in an employer/employee relationship than in a professional/client one.

These conditions would seem to be more conducive to collective bargaining than those of PWAC, for example, because editors' work is less "creative" and there is less concern for artistic autonomy. But union-type organizing was even less in evidence than in PWAC.

Most of the editors who came to the initial meeting of FEAC welcomed the opportunity to talk to other freelancers about their problems with publishers and the isolation they experienced. Recognizing that other people were in the same position as themselves, many were soon confident enough to admit they were badly underpaid. But some of the editors, especially the older, more experienced ones, found the discussion of rates and conditions threatening. They did not want to be associated with newcomers to the field and were worried that sharing information would

diminish their high status. And all of the editors feared that publishers would stop hiring them if they organized. In addition, there was concern that because many freelancers worked for small Canadian publishers, some of which were underfinanced and unprofitable, that they would be threatening the industry itself if they asked for more money.

At least two men were hesitant to associate themselves with women and "women's work". Organizing with us, they feared, meant losing their status and consequent higher wages. On one memorable occasion a man suggested that most of the women freelance editors were "housewives" who were "doing a little editing on the side".

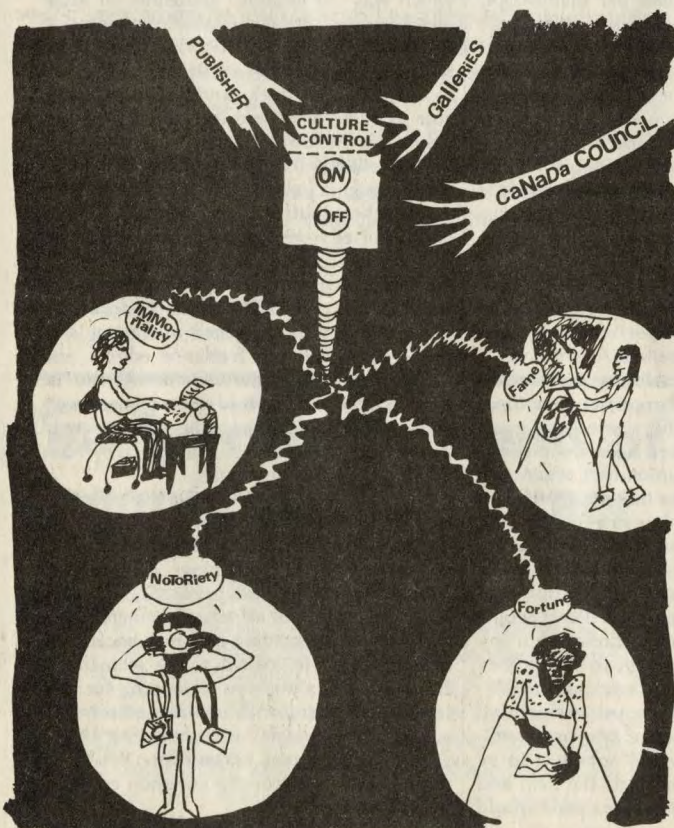
The obvious benefits of sharing information and setting "suggested" rates were enough to at least temporarily allay most of these fears. It soon became clear that, although some publishers complained, most were prepared to pay what FEAC was asking for — which helped the editors realize not only the importance of their role in the publishing process but the fact that up until then, they had been grossly underpaid. FEAC developed a constitution, a central aim of which was "to establish guidelines to assist members in securing equitable compensation and good working relations." However, it did not attempt to develop a standard contract or to bargain collectively and has never been able to agree to defend its members against publishers who do not pay on time (or at all!), or who change the conditions of work midway through a project.

Once these initial gains were made, the emphasis shifted from a concern with wages and working conditions to professional development. The current *Directory of Members* describes as one of FEAC's "most important" goals, "to promote communication and cooperation between freelance editors and their clients". Freelance editors seem to be making a tradeoff: instead of the higher wages and improved working conditions they could win through collective bargaining, they have opted for "professional" status.

FEAC has anonymously investigated members' hourly and yearly earnings, but it has never conducted an inquiry on the basis of sex to compare the earnings of men and women in the area. It has never raised the problem of child care or asked its members if they had difficulty attending meetings because of their children. In a field where women are continually in a position of looking for new work and meeting with in-house editors and authors (chiefly male), there has never been a discussion of sexual harassment. Yet all of these issues are becoming common concerns in trade unions today.

myths that obscure the collective nature of our lot as creative workers, and hence also of the potential for collective action. The main myth for a cultural worker is that you might Make It! The myth features the starving artist (or writer) in his (never her) Paris garret, sacrificing money and family in order to create. Finally, after much suffering and dues paying, there springs the Great Canadian Novel (or painting, or play or poem or article) for which one gets a \$50 thousand paperback contract, serialization and a movie sale, and fame forever. Although cultural workers no longer move to Paris to find their garrets, the myth is very much alive, and it is an important impediment to organizing cultural workers. Anyone whose energy is fuelled by dreams of individual fame and fortune is reluctant to function collectively.

Another important myth that keeps freelancers from forming real unions is the myth of Professionalism. Freelance cultural workers are said to be professionals, who have a professional commitment to their work, a dedication that supercedes financial gain. Thus they are supposed to care more about the work than about money, and collective bargaining for better wages would be seen as lowly and unprofessional. And the myth has a germ of truth: most of us are university educated and have middle-class choices about where and how to work. Our work lives are privileged compared to people who are trapped in repetitive assembly-line jobs. There aren't any bosses or foremen standing over us, and we control our own schedules. We enjoy the luxury of making something from start to finish and knowing it's ours: an article, a painting, a book.



But there remains a relationship of power between the people who produce culture and the people who pay for it. Historically, if a painter could not attract a wealthy patron and do work that pleased the patron, then no matter how "good" a painter he was, there would be no bread on the table. The system of cultural patronage is now corporate and governmental but the relationships of power still exists.

In many instances however, freelancers appear to be in the same social class as their editors or gallery/theatre directors. A working relationship between, for example, a writer and an editor, does not have the worker/boss or worker/foreman appearance of more conventional working relationships; it looks like a producer/client relationship, one between equals. But that appearance is deceiving when the client has the power to determine the nature of the product or whether it will be 'produced', and the producer has almost none.

In this way it is obvious that consciousness plays a major role in freelancers' approach to organizing and to union activity. But the importance of consciousness extends beyond the bounds of how these people see or do not see themselves as workers; for they are in the business of producing ideas, which are the stuff of which consciousness is made.

Cultural workers are different from other workers: as the producers of ideas, they are the producers of society's image of itself. In producing the words and pictures that describe the world to people, they are creating and re-creating ideology. According to Stuart Hall, a sociologist at England's Open University, ideology is

any of the frameworks which groups of people use in order to understand or define for themselves what's going on. We look out on the world: we think we know what we know. But actually, of course, we are perceiving the events within a particular framework. The framework has limits; there are certain things about it we don't see, certain kinds of questions we don't ask ... certain frameworks become dominant at a certain period.

The dominant ideology in this period and place is pro-capitalist, anti-trade union. Successful artists and writers have passed through a series of invisible gates that open into the world of the dominant ideology. Whether they are aware of it or not, they produce what they have been socialized to produce after years of lengthy training (both formal and informal). They are prevented from producing oppositional culture (work that takes a clear position against the dominant ideology), as much by their own conditioning as by the dictates of their bosses.

One of the ways the dominant ideology is reproduced in cultural workers is through a code of professional ethics. The code is largely unwritten but everyone is taught to internalize it as she or he rises through the ranks. One of its articles of faith is that taking action — such as struggling as a worker against management — is an inappropriate role for a writer or artist. As truth tellers who reveal society to itself, writers must be "objective" observers of events; artists must hover over society, unpolluted by its politics. To participate by fighting for themselves or anyone else is to sacrifice the essential distance from events that gives them their perspective. In this way writers and artists are

forced to reproduce and strengthen existing values, not to challenge them.

As individuals it is almost impossible for us to rebel against the strictures that decide what we can and cannot write or speak or depict, if we want to be published or shown. And this is a major political reason for organizing. Collectively, it is possible to make inroads on the dominant ideology and to begin to change it. During the 1970s, printers in England refused to print racist cartoons in newspapers, and major newspapers were published with blanked-out areas. In South America, journalists insisted on large areas of newspapers being left blank where the censors had left their mark. In Canada, well-known writers and journalists added their names to a list of feminist, gay and lesbian activists in support of the *Body Politic* in a full-page advertisement in *The Globe and Mail*.

But the work of the organizations of writers and artists that we have been considering have tended to put more emphasis on owning their ideas, through individual copyright, than on controlling their ideas, through collective political action.

Models for Organizing Cultural Workers

THERE HAVE, NEVERTHELESS, BEEN SERIOUS attempts by artists and writers who want to challenge the status quo to put the strength of their numbers to political use. In Quebec there have been three attempts to organize militant, political umbrella organizations of workers in the area of culture. The first two, in 1972 and 1977, fell apart through political splintering and sectarian squabbles, but the third, the Front des travailleuses culturelles (FTC) began in 1981 and is still strong. Its aims are to fight for Quebec content in big institutional cultural expenditures, for democratic control of the culture industry, for a minimum wage for cultural workers, for job security and health and other benefits.

Another such organization was the Cultural Workers Alliance. Socialist artists, writers and musicians — organizing across workplace lines — held a founding conference in Peterborough in May 1980. The CWA adopted the following objectives: To foster solidarity and cooperation among cultural workers; to support the development of culture produced by groups excluded from or discriminated against by the dominant socio-economic and cultural order; to oppose the increasing monopolization of culture and communication industries; to oppose racist, sexist and other reactionary cultural expression; and to support freedom from censorship.

In contrast to the experience in the work-related organizations, feminists "came out" and played a strong role in CWA. At its founding meeting a feminist caucus called for a more democratic structure, which was adopted by the meeting. Robin Endres explained later:

SPRING 1984



...we felt that we had evolved ways of thinking, styles of work and organizational forms in the women's movement which could be used and adapted to the benefit of the group as a whole.

CWA locals were set up in Halifax, Peterborough, Montreal and Toronto. In Halifax, a group of radicals at the prestigious Nova Scotia College of Art and Design urged students to take up the region's historical and social problems and make links with existing left organizations and unions. This involved opposition to a Michelin plant that was opening up with the provincial government's (illegal) assurance that the workers could not unionize, investigation of Nova Scotia's labour history, participation in an anti-Ku Klux Klan group and the recognition of the function of the art college as a showpiece for the province. The group also worked to improve the position of clerical workers and models at the school, most of whom were women, and to encourage student participation in hiring and firing (one of the concerns was to hire more women to the school's studio division). In Montreal, CWA activists picketed the Beaux Arts performance of *Balconville* in solidarity with locked-out support staff, members of Le Syndicat des placeurs et ouvreuses (Ushers and Ticket Takers Union). In Toronto, central issues were questions of censorship, racism, public funding of the arts and the economic status of cultural workers. Both Toronto and Montreal also had active feminist groups within their locals.

In spite of these forceful initiatives, the CWA dissolved a year later. The group had generated a lot of needed interac-

THE FACT THAT CULTURAL WORKERS PRODUCE IDEOLOGY MEANS THAT WORKERS IN THIS AREA HAVE INTERESTS DIFFERENT FROM OTHER WORKERS

tion between socialists in the cultural community. But the lack of central organization (for example, someone who heard about CWA and wanted to form a Halifax branch did not know where to apply) and clear priorities, combined with the problem of diverse political ideologies, all worked against it. Another problem was one of trying to bring together an extremely fragmented community of people from different work areas. CWA had no funding and no people who could afford to work full time to keep it going. There were no strong contacts with labour unions, which might have been able to support it.

A more specific and perhaps for that reason more successful organizational venture is the Toronto Women's Cultural Building, which was formed in early 1982 to consider setting up a women's cultural centre. After some discussion, it seemed wiser and more practical to put the group's enthusiasm into expanding feminist culture all over the city — and the "building" in their name became a verb.

The Women's Cultural Building is a collective of about thirty women, all feminists. They are artists, video artists, writers, theatre people and arts administrators, some of whom were involved in the CWA. On International Women's Day in 1983, the WCB launched a series of poetry readings, video, performance art, dance and visual art exhibitions with a feminist extravaganza called the *Five Minute Feminist Cabaret*. For women long used to noting the oppressive and numbing effects of the dominant ideology, the Five Minute Feminist Cabaret and the weeks of feminist cultural events that followed it, showed clearly how successful feminists can be in transcending the dominant ideology. In focusing on bringing out the *culture* rather than on the *conditions* of cultural workers, the WCB has not served as a body that aims to organize women in the arts. But it encourages and supports feminist culture and it is using the political potential of culture to affect people.

We can look to Quebec to see another successful organizational form. In English Canada there are some progressive collective cultural organizations, but in Quebec there are hundreds of co-ops that organize cultural workers. They function as anti-establishment collectives designed to give artists and writers both the support they need to create and access to an audience. The sculptor's association provides equipment that individuals could not afford; the theatre collectives produce progressive plays; publishing collectives publish indigenous poetry and fiction; feminist art collectives support and show feminist art; Montreal has a feminist theatre building and a collectively-run feminist magazine, *La Vie en Rose*. Although these collectives run largely on volunteer labour and do not therefore change people's paid working lives, they are important. They give cultural workers the experience of working

together, the support to continue and the basis from which to challenge the dominant ideology. In fact, the majority of groups forming the FTC are not trade unions but these cultural collectives that are so common in Quebec. And, although the FTC shares with the CWA some of the inevitable problems of organizing outside of the workplace, it demonstrates the progressive possibilities for cultural workers.

Another recent development in Toronto is the Labour Arts and Media Working Group, a committee made up of trade unionists and people from the arts community whose aim is to "encourage communication and cooperation...on economic, political and cultural issues of common interest." So far this has involved discussion of how trade unions and artists, to some extent both outsiders in this society, can benefit each other. For example, progressive artists and writers could use union-made materials and printing facilities in their work. Trade unions could ask artists to design their leaflets, posters, stickers and buttons, and progressive writers and editors to help produce their written material. Unions are a large potential audience for the work of playwrights and performance artists. And these art works and performances in turn are of value to unionists because they reflect people's daily experiences at work and elsewhere.

Specific Cultural Interests Specific Political Goals

In understanding the problems and possibilities for organizing cultural workers, it is important to understand the traditionally individual nature of producing art and other specific factors regarding the nature of cultural production. The fact that cultural workers produce ideology means that workers in this area have interests different from other workers.

When we began organizing PWAC and FEAC we wanted to build workplace organizations that would also have political impact. Our experience and our examination of other cultural organizations indicates an apparent unresolvable split between work area issues (like income and working conditions) and broader political struggles. The limited impact of the work area organizations does not negate the necessity of organizing at that level. But, until, as cultural workers, we understand our place in the larger political economy, both our political effectiveness and our ability to achieve workplace control will be limited.

A Well-Aimed Rock Exposing the History of 'Modernism'

INGRID KOENIG

How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art

Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War

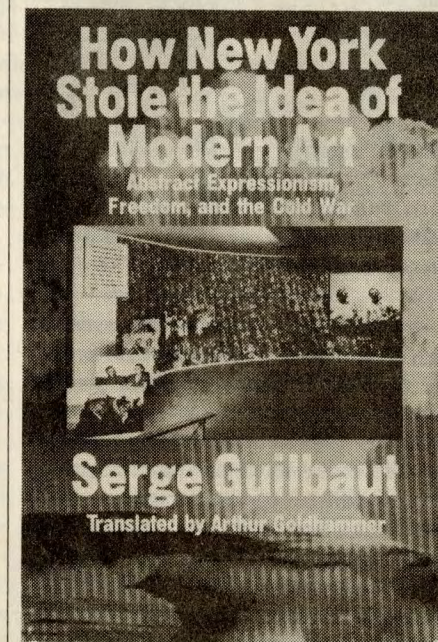
By Serge Guilbaut
Translated by Arthur Goldhammer
The University of Chicago Press
\$22.50

PERHAPS THIS BOOK HAS COME to the dangerously conservative art world just in time, though I would not let out a sigh of relief just yet. One would hope this is not another cry in the "wilderness", and that it may instead serve as an important model and resource of primary research, documentation, and analysis for critically engaged historians, critics, artists, and teachers. During Professor Guilbaut's carefully "guided tour" of the sacred gallery hall of the ideologically mis-led and institutionalized American avant-garde, one is struck by the parallels to the current cultivated Cold War. This is not to historically simplify two distinct periods. However it is obvious we are experiencing the institutional reproduction of cold war artists, or to borrow a term from Guilbaut, the coming out of "aesthetic soldiers", or to be blunter still, the banal coup of the neo-Modernist junta.

Furthermore we have the same popular press which perpetuates the Red scare, and helps to proliferate military build-up. The third world war is very much on everyone's mind, only now we do think the 'unthinkable' and Hollywood shows it to us as a freakish spectacle, strangely close to *Gone With the Wind*.

The way in which Guilbaut has written *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* could be likened to a pro-

secuting lawyer who has all the evidence he needs to reveal not the crime, but the real workings behind high culture. He takes us through the many halls of sophisticated documentation, supplying proof after proof of false consciousness and blind-alley idealism. What is thus revealed is one of the greatest propagandistic illusions



of this century's art. It is not Guilbaut who does the hanging but the extensive quoting from original sources which he has so thoroughly researched. His close examination of writings, of the ideological/political changes undergone by artists and the leading American cultural intellectuals — Dwight MacDonald, Miriam Schapiro, and Clement Greenberg; his examination of the popular press, from *Harper's Bazaar*, to *Life*, to the *New York Times*; the interviews he had, and those he was refused; his extensive use

of primary archival materials; as well as the detailed political analysis of the American political structure during the 1930's and 40's, provides a resource book of long-term significance which will have to be reckoned with by any serious artist, art historian, or critic.

Guilbaut is careful to point out he is not writing a thesis to reveal a conspiracy between American politics and culture. Due to his carefully laid out research he is successful in avoiding this. On the other hand it becomes evident how insidious and ideologically manipulated the artists, journalists, and public were in the name of democracy and how internationalism (American modernism) developed into imperialism.

Guilbaut questions the success of abstract expressionism, suggesting this success is not so much grounded in superior aesthetics, but rather in the eventual intersecting ideologies of artists, journalists, and the American post-WWII government. In order to understand these ideologies one must ask, what was left out of the mainstream discourse and what was hidden, and why? It becomes clear how nonautonomous art production is, no matter how abstract. It also becomes clear how significant the transfer of cultural hegemony from Paris to New York was, the significance lying in the fact that where the economic and military power lies, there too lies the cultural domination. Henry Luce's essay of 1941, "The American Century" becomes an important reference point.

As we are led through the disillusionment and factionalization of the Left (during the Moscow trials, the Hitler-Stalin pact), through the eventual swing to the liberal right, we are shown

the arguments between American regional art and the internationalism of modern abstract art. The artists' dilemma becomes clear as they faced losing the *Works Projects Administration* state patronage and were left to wander in the competitive market which in the early 40's only supported French art. Many artists who were socially committed on the Left had, by 1943, become so disillusioned with politics that they rejected history along with it, searching for a timeless art, a universal art that would transcend language, class, and would also avoid the abuses of propaganda. Guilbaut shows the correlation between this ideology and an influential literary work of 1942, Wendell Willkie's *One World*.

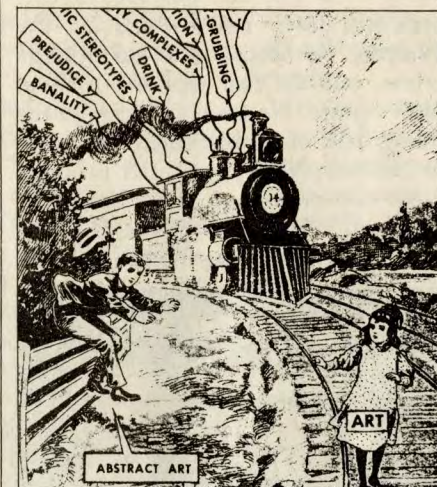
"What remained of their old leftist ideas was the desire and the need to communicate with the public." Guilbaut points out that Motherwell's writings of that time are important for understanding how the avant-garde developed. Artists saw themselves battling for freedom, not only in the political arena (democracy vs. totalitarianism) but also in the realm of all-consuming mass culture. Their focus went on to mass abstraction and the individual creator. Miriam Schapiro was writing that artists expressed their alienated freedom within the system, thereby presenting a critical opposition. However, Guilbaut points out:

Everyone was anti-authoritarian and critical of the status quo, but dead set as they were against authority they did not see that individualism as a combative stance could easily combine with individualism as a form of quietism or withdrawal, old-fashioned bourgeois individualism that did not trouble itself with avant-garde subtleties.

Further on we are shown the new relationship between buyers and sellers of art after WWII. "The art boom followed the economic boom." Accordingly, Clement Greenberg wrote about the dangerous shrinkage of elitism in modern art, faced with the new affluent middle class who bought art for purposes not necessarily spiritual. Art must be unique and yet, for the first time in history, art was a part of everyday life. Even department stores were selling original oil paintings.

Guilbaut goes into some detail in

discussing the Marshall Plan and its political and cultural influence in France and the United States. There is a fascinating examination of the American export of culture, especially in the film industry, against which the French fought. "The glamorized and popularized art of abstract expressionism became the avant-garde wedge used to pierce the European suspicion that Americans were only capable of producing kitsch." Along with the export of high art, global expansionism reached a new level in the name of artistic freedom.



Editorial cartoon by Ad Reinhardt in *Newsweek*, August 12, 1946

In discussing how America made the transition from a colonized nation to the colonizer, Guilbaut looks at how American art was used and how it achieved international success. Painting had come from nationalism to internationalism to universalism. This "universal" art had a brutalized, unfinished look, the force and violence of America, the virility of Pollock's "ejaculations". Only this expressionism could speak of the dilemma of modern society. Furthermore, as Guilbaut cites René d'Harnoncourt's writing of 1948, the variety, exploration, and anti-collectivism in modern art was an appropriate symbol of democracy. Guilbaut suggests that here is one of the first reconciliations of avant-garde ideology with post-war liberalism. He credits Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s book, *The Vital Center*, as an important guideline for this new liberalism. It was important for the United States to improve its cultural image in Europe and the American

avant-garde became a useful symbol of the ideology of freedom. Artistic rebellion was thus transformed into an aggressive liberal ideology.

The expression of anxiety became a fascinating tool of propaganda. The artist felt it impossible to act, in the sense of a critical practice, and the resultant turning inward was conceived as the alienation of modern, but free, "man". "If the artist wanted to be truly free, then according to the avant-garde he had to be completely alienated. This was the price of genuine communication." In fact alienation became a sign of privilege in the Western world. Guilbaut emphasizes the important developing connection between the artist's alienation from modern society and studies of neurosis. "Marxism gave way to psychiatry. The individual moved into the place of history and social relations." Accordingly we also see the separation of art and politics in the minds of artists, critics, and historians. Artists such as Rothko turned to myth and primitive art to express the modern horrors. Here Guilbaut uses Barthes' analysis of myth as that which empties the immediate sociopolitical significance out of human action, transforming "history into nature".

The contradiction between freedom of expression and the impossibility of representation produced an art of fragmentation, obliteration and erasure. By means of some detailed pictorial analyses of abstract expressionist paintings Guilbaut confronts us with the new human experience of the unthinkable — the atom bomb and total annihilation. This he says became the "essence of modernity". The historical naturalization of the bomb as a part of modern daily life gives an immediacy to our own culture's acceptance/fight with the military and nuclear technology.

There is an interesting twist of language in this book, contrasting with the religiosity of most mainstream art history texts. The extensive injection of militaristic terms has obviously been used to emphasize the close alignment between the Cold War and its cultural products. Phrases such as the following: "ideological guerilla warfare", "liberal warrior", "aesthetic soldiers" fighting on the "cultural front", and the reference to

courtesy University of Chicago Press



Cover page of an article by Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. in the *New York Times Magazine*, April 4, 1948, reproduced in Guilbaut's book.

artists and intellectuals as "storm troopers" in what Eisenhower called "psychological warfare", brings home the fact that American high culture, i.e. modernism, came to function on the same level as the military in defending economic and democratic liberties of the "free" world.

One may at first question why Guilbaut even uses the by now insipid pluralist term "avant-garde". However, in the course of the book the term eventually demystifies itself, and the heroic ideology around this depoliticized group becomes transparent.

It would have been interesting to know if there were any artists who continued to engage in a critical practice but did not fit into the predominant role model of the artist, thereby "escaping" historical documentation. In fact, one major disappointment is the continual use of the male pronoun when referring to artists. It is no longer acceptable to continue using a male-defined term for "artist".

There were obviously women abstract expressionists who were, for reasons clearly suggested in the book, not presentable in the macho-defined world of modernism. The myth of the procreative male artist overflows in

some of the original quotes. And the book provides thorough resource material regarding the power relationships which claimed that work such as Pollock's addressed the "universality of individual experience" — while women's experiences, as well as those of other classes, races and cultures, were kept undefined and unaddressed. The new "universal" art was to have the "virility" of America, its violence, force, brutality and crudeness which Pollock was seen to embody. Yet this modernism in fact contained the violence, force, and brutality that defines it not as universal, but as imperialist.

When Guilbaut was researching particularly crucial connections between the export of American culture and its financial supporters (business and government), he was refused interviews by some persons and organizations directly involved. "There are pools that apparently stink if they are stirred." This book is a well-aimed rock thrown into the festering pools of modernist rhetoric, and its ripples may help to overturn the creaking gunboats that have sailed far too long.

Ingrid Koenig is an art student living in Halifax.

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TECHKNOWLEDGE

Archives, Editors and Activists

What's Wrong with this Photograph(er)?

PHILIP MONK

Mining Photographs and Other Pictures

A Selection from the Negative Archives of Shedden Studio, Glace Bay, Cape Breton 1948-1968.

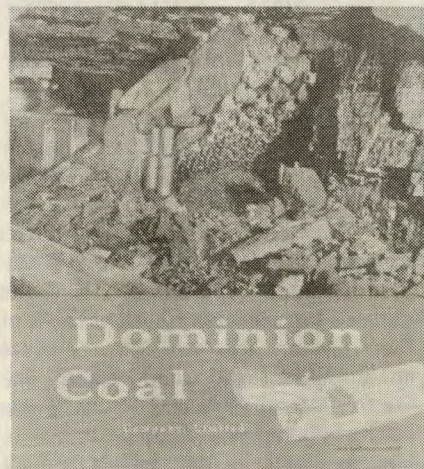
Photographs by Leslie Shedden
Essays by Don Macgillivray and Allan Sekula
Introduction by Robert Wilkie
Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and The University of Cape Breton Press
\$25.00

HERE IS A PICTURE BOOK THAT wants to be critical of picture books at the same time. *Mining Photographs and Other Pictures* attempts to change our relation to the innocent pleasure or authoritative truth of illustrated books to a knowledge of their construction of meaning. And its authors want to make us aware that photography, in contributing to this product and commerce of images, turns itself and its subjects into commodities.

This publication is neither a coffee table book nor a document. While its industrial subject may be of recent fashion, the other pictures of the title — ordinary small town commercial photography — are not typical of an art publication. But what is most unusual about the book is that it brings together a publisher of the international art avant-garde and a body of photographs by a small town commercial photographer.

Leslie Shedden was the local photographer to the coal miners and merchants of Glace Bay, Cape Breton. But more importantly for this project, Shedden was regularly commissioned by the Dominion Steel and Coal Company (Dosco) for images to be used in public relations during the period 1948-1968, the years covered by the

book. These images comprise more than half the book's photographs, and in themselves number close to 2000. The accompanying texts examine what use is made of photographs by industry and commerce once they leave the hands of the photographer and are put into a process of exchange. The "other pictures" — family portraits, store fronts, class pictures, sports



Shedden photo illustrating cover of 1956 Dosco Annual Report

teams, etc. — are published in an attempt to recover a working class culture.

The book also is an announcement by the Press that it wanted to change not only its subject here, from art to mass culture, but its practice as well. (Unfortunately the Press will probably be closing after the next two titles are published, and we will not be able to witness the extent of this change.) The institution of this archive and the nature of the collaboration between the editors of the archive, the editors of the Press and the authors of the critical texts in the book (these positions are generally complementary) are part of

this process. The photographs were brought to the attention of the NSCAD Press in 1980 by Cyril MacDonald who had acquired the negatives, as is common, in the general purchase of the business. According to Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, the editor of the Press, this happened at a time when the Press was critically revising its policies. Until that time the Press (which is associated with the art college) had published "The Nova Scotia Series: Source Materials of the Contemporary Arts", mainly artists' writings and documents of the American minimalist and postminimalist movements, and more recently "Pamphlets", bookworks by current American or European artists.

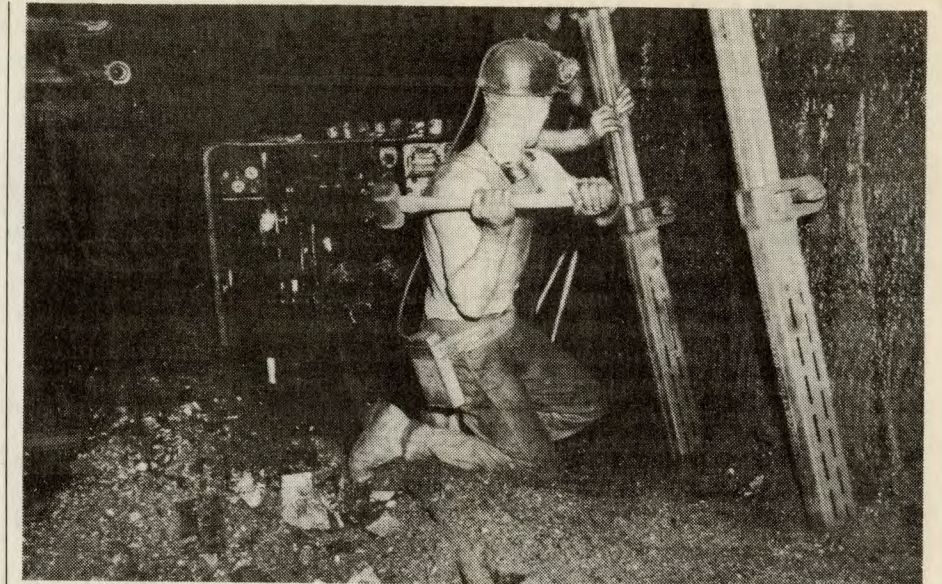
In a changed economy of art, where contemporary art is no longer automatically critical, "it became clear," according to Buchloh, "that contemporary cultural practice that defined itself as critical practice had to address issues that were at the same time more general (the conditions of mass culture) and more specific (the particular formations of ideology in the place where critical practice wants to be operative)." Buchloh's "Editorial Note" not only indicated the future direction of the Press, it pointed to the nature of this project and the function that the photographs were to serve in it, as a place of the formation of ideology in mass culture. "This documentation of the photographic activities of a local commercial photographer from Cape Breton — beyond the inherent interest of the body of photographs itself — intends therefore to function as an attempt at or an example of a critical investigation of the conditions of cultural production at a very specific moment: the historical intersection between colonization and marginalization, its social and political implica-

tions, and its cultural consequences."

As a cultural production itself at a very specific moment, *Mining Photographs* has to be judged for its implications and cultural consequences, the tools that it offers, and for whether it contributes to an understanding, not only of the photographs and their role in ideological formation in mass culture, but also of the specific moment of the historical intersection it talks about. Thus a judgement of the Press's new practice has to be made not only against the critical tools it advances, but also against the procedures of its product: the social relations it depicts and enacts itself. In other words, we can ask of criticism what it seeks to display in photography, namely, that it show its own social relations within its representational apparatus. Therefore the criticism here is restricted to the success of the critical practice, not to its subject, but its relation to its subject. The subject and declared change in practice add up to a significant enterprise and important book.

In a photographic culture such as ours, photography has different values and uses: the instant of a photograph is not a simple matter. Photography's "direct" relation to its subject, to what we may call the reality it also constructs, is more than complex. Moreover, photography's social relations are obscured by the commercial functions it serves when it enters into a network of significations — the newspaper, for instance. Its historical

MINING PHOTOS



1955: Miners installing friction steel support jacks for the Dosco Miner

moment and reference — the reality of its image — are disrupted in the values it upholds when it enters the hierarchies of fine art culture. In a culture where exchange value dominates, and use value is never simple, photography has a function that is not merely illustrative, and a value that is not purely aesthetic. Whether made for use or abstracted from use, photography's function is ideological. More than serving commercial or industrial purposes, photography has had an actual effect on the subjects it depicts, in the instrumentalization of their labour.

When the photograph is no longer of current value for the newservice and

1963: Miners on payroll, receiving for the first time a cheque instead of cash



SPRING 1984

FUSE

has not been claimed by the museum, it is put into suspension in various archives. Either institution may resurrect the photograph at any time for their own purposes; but it can serve other functions that this book attempts to make clear. Once detached from its commercial and aesthetic functions, partly as a result of our understanding those functions as social determinants, photography can be used. It can be used, not against itself in a deconstructive formalism, but against the institutions that directed its use, meaning and reading. If photography is not directly appropriated by groups for positive representations of themselves, the archive may be used to retrieve other histories that have been lost to us, more from suppression than forgetfulness. Against those that maintain property rights by the control and distribution of imagery in mass media, advertising and entertainment, "the archive has to be read from below, from a position of solidarity with those displaced, deformed, silenced or made invisible by the machineries of profit and progress", as the historian and critic of photography Allan Sekula has written in his contribution to the book. But first an archive must be formed according to the editors of the archive in order for a resistance to photography to be played out.

Since class struggle also takes place through photographic representations, control of the archive is a primary aim of this book. An archive from which

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suppressed histories might be reclaimed is one use the editors want to make of Shedden's photographs. According to Robert Wilkie, the co-editor who wrote the introduction, these photographs can be turned against their corporate sponsors and at the same time can be saved from appropriation by "dominant cultural institutions". Moreover, against that hegemony, this archive is an attempt to intervene in the exclusionary hierarchies of "dominant esthetic practice" which would reject an archive of a commercial photographer such as Shedden. This has been achieved in part by the stated change of practice of the Press and its intervention into its avant-garde milieu on behalf of this archive. This ambition, however, might be seen as contradictory to that of saving the photographs from appropriation by "dominant cultural institutions".

This anxiety to intervene into the exclusionary hierarchies may instead reinforce and fetishize the dominant institution. Who decides on photography's cultural practice, and who decides how it will intervene? Here, it is not the photographer. And so, just as we ask of photography, we can ask who is being represented here? To whom is the book addressed? The answer depends on what use can be made of it. We have to ask about the nature of the archive and its intervention, the use of the tools of its analysis, and the notion of who is being represented by that use.

What the editors want to make of this archive depends in part on what they want to make of a photographer like Shedden. They do not want to overvalue him as an artist nor devalue him as a functionary of industry. Shedden's photographs are the occasion for the project but not the rationale behind it. Shedden is not the actual benefactor of this archive: in selling his business it left his hands, just as the photographs left his control when delivered to Dosco. But he is still alive, and the project could not be pursued without his permission or name. However, setting up the archive implies what is called the "death of the author": the needs of the archive, or its editors, take precedence over an individual "creator". And thus Wilkie established the editors' position and obligations in

relation to Shedden: "the photographer, once actively producing photographs, now assumes a passive position, while the editors intervene from their passive (non-producing) role and activate work made by someone else." At the same time, Shedden's complicity in the exchange of photographs, a complicity in the very production of industrial photography itself, must be shown. "On the one hand, we have the photographer, who, in fulfilling his business obligations, produced images intended for specific readings — those of advertising, public relations, celebration and personal memory — with little claim over their distant future determination. On the other hand there are the editors [of the archive]. In a sense we have been mining' photographs from an inert archives, and in doing so have fulfilled our obligations by contributing to the continuing work of social historians, socially engaged artists, and individuals and groups, who wish to assist in the reclamation of an otherwise suppressed history." Many of the contradictions of the book follow from this change of role and obligation and from the need to ambivalently criticize someone who is at the same time guest and host.

The complicity of Shedden in the production of industrial photography is to be proved in two ways. One is to show the use to which Shedden's photographs were put by Dosco in its publications *Teamwork* and *Dosco World*. These photographs disguised the real working conditions and the extraction of surplus value from the miners.¹ The constant demand of capital for increased productivity was expressed through a paternalistic call for "teamwork" in a "family" of owners, managers and workers. If

1. In his "Short History of Photography", Walter Benjamin quoted Brecht as saying that "less than at any time does a simple reproduction of reality tell us something about reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or GEC [two German industrial concerns] yields almost nothing about these institutions. Reality proper has slipped into the functional. The reification of human relationships, the factory, let's say, no longer reveals these relationships. Therefore something has actually to be constructed, something artificial set up." Criticism can pose as that artificial construction set up against the seamless "reality" the image projects in order to bring out the social relations that the image obscures. But in setting itself up, criticism should not disappear in a feigned objectivity. Construction automatically imposes on itself conditions of representation. Criticism's own constructions of representation therefore should be displayed.

these photographs distorted the reality and social relations of their subjects, it seems that further proof of this complicity is offered in another aspect of Shedden's practice by the fact that he hid the technical nature of the photographic medium, in his aspiration to art genres, by hand tinting portraits (which he took to be his primary work) as well as landscapes. ("The key word here," writes Wilkie, "is craft, for what Shedden was really resisting [in refusing colour processing] was the mechanization of photographic production, since the colour process involved sending the negatives off to a distant laboratory beyond the control of the craftsman." In other words, Shedden maintained for himself what was denied his subjects in the Dosco photographs.) Shedden's concern with photography as the aestheticizing mastery of a craft is taken to be the ideological content of a technical practice that denies the socio-political "landscape" of the region. In the case of landscape, photography falls into the picturesque, akin to the kitsch commerciality of postcards. These issues in Wilkie's introduction are juxtaposed to Shedden's practice without him actually being named or criticized. The somewhat contradictory analysis that Wilkie renders is due to this need to criticize without offending — to let the reader in on what the subject did not know. This ambiguous relation to the producing subject behind the new subject of the book obscures criticism's own social relations.

In fact, the book is only interested in the archive, to which it maintains its relations as to an ideal object. It is presumed that the archive is photography's end and therefore essential condition. This absolves the critic or editor of any social relation or representation that takes him or her outside the archive. But this particular archive is not an ideal archive to work with since it is not broadly enough based, given the single individual that composes it, to discover its regularities, specificities, rules of formation, etc., the terms in which Foucault has assigned the tool of the archive, and on whose ideas the ordering of this photographic archive is partly based. There is neither enough specificity nor range to its historical material. Great parts of community



Studio portraits, Glace Bay: left, young woman in Celtic pipers outfit; right, young boy in Roy Rogers outfit

social life and private experience are missing from this archive. Everything is mediated through this one photographer who did not have this in mind in "recording" his community. The whole project of the book is too narrowly based on something that seems arbitrary, almost accidental.

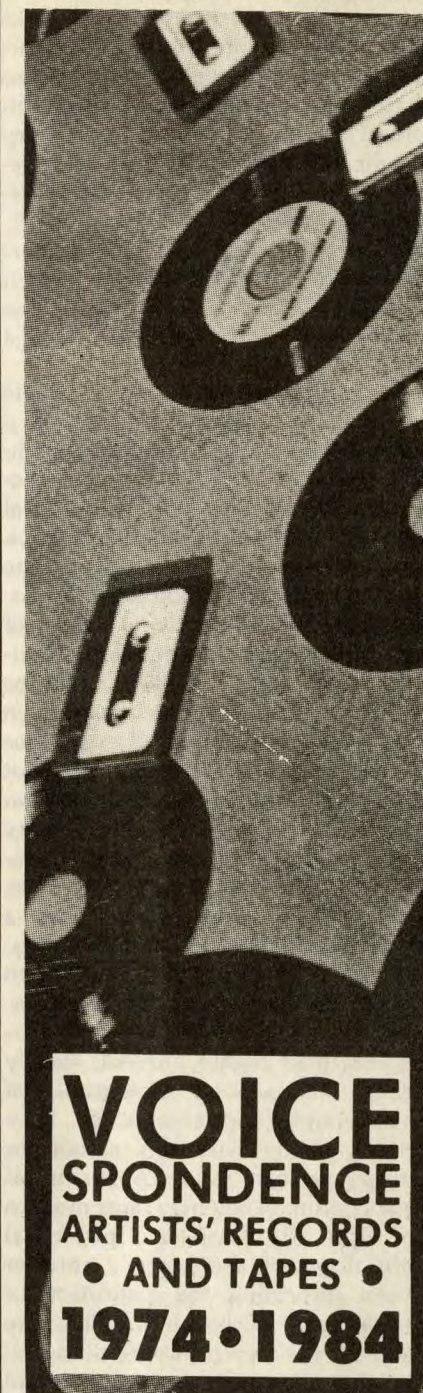
The receipt of the negatives was fortuitous: from within Nova Scotia, the home of the Press; with the subject of mining that recorded a local (to Halifax?) working class under the conditions of exploitive monopoly capitalism; and although Halifax is not Cape Breton, both, but Cape Breton in particular, suffer as an underdeveloped economy and periphery that is first to feel the effects of crises in metropolitan economies. Just as Shedden is accidental, although fortuitous, to the project, so are Cape Breton and the miners since the conjuncture of this book is not the intersection between marginalization and colonization, but a specific moment in critical practice. Thus this criticism has not been able to address the "contradiction" in cultural practice Buchloh mentions, except through a demand to change that practice.

Wilkie admits that the book "can make no claims to represent the peoples and the history of Cape Breton. What it does represent, in full view of its contradictions, is an at-

tempt to provide a critical link between a social history, a group of cultural forms, and the people who live that history and that culture." If the book fails to make these links, we have to readdress our questions to the other "accidental" connections mentioned above. And we have to address these as relations of location and class.

On social and economic issues, we find no concrete analysis of "the historical intersection between colonization and marginalization" that post-war Cape Breton seems to exemplify for Buchloh. We find no analysis of the economic relations of periphery to centre that are common to underdevelopment and specific to the contradictions within the Canadian economy. The book makes no use of Canadian tools: the analyses of Canadian political economy of Marxist or left-Innisian point of view. To the conditions of "a region persistently suffering from economic troubles," Sekula offers only one footnote in his essay "Photography Between Labour and Capital": "I would like to refer the Canadian reader especially to a work by Lacan's first translator and critical interpreter, Anthony Wilden: *The Imaginary Canadian*". This is comprehensible in this context since Wilden's book is written from a Lacanian psychoanalytical rather than economic position. Sekula's lengthy text devoted to "the emerging picture-

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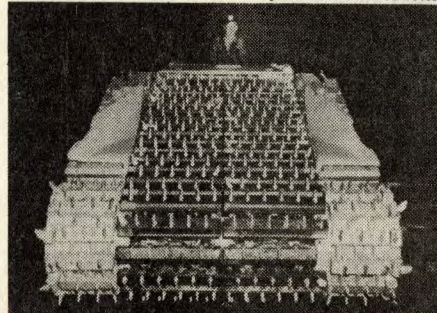
language of industrial capitalism", worthwhile and inventive in its own right, only touches on Shedden in its peripheries. Although Sekula claims that "Leslie Shedden's photographs would seem to allow for an exemplary insight into the diverse and contradictory ways in which photography effects the lives of working people", Shedden again seems an accidental correspondence to Sekula's study, which is itself in turn not only one of the rationales, but the strength, of the book.

Buchloh's rejection of a "false regionalism" and the failure of a "nationalism within a traditional high-art framework" in favour of the practice of this book is stated in his editorial note, mean nothing when this book offers no specific analysis of the economic conditions that lead the people of those places to a sense of regionalism and nationalism. Similarly, the "links" Wilkie mentions never cohere since we are never given those forms of culture and experience of that particular working class, not even in the essay by the Cape Breton labour historian Don Macgillivray ("Glance Bay: Images and Impressions"). Macgillivray's essay is an affirmation of a culture rather than a specific analysis of its cultural forms. Shedden's photographs have little to do with a lived sense of culture and experience. The community photographs, those highly ordered, starkly formal, standardized photographs of groups: pupils, sports teams, etc., have nothing to do with this class's, or groups within it, own forms of organization. (They may have more to do with Foucault's "political technology of the body", another notion informing the institution of photography in the book.) They are not even their own photographs, except that the miners may have paid Shedden for portraits. No expression is allowed this class by the format of the archive.

Above all this looms the question of working class culture and the relations of the authors' analyses to it. These photographs are not in themselves evidence of popular, mass or working class culture. History and culture are not there to be extracted as so much subject matter. If, on the other hand, these photographs are sites of the for-

mation of ideology, whom do these interventions into photography serve? The relation of this book to a culture for which it seeks to speak but does not define is ambiguous. Buchloh offers the book to the people of the region: "We hope very much that the book will find its readers first of all among these people." But at \$25.00 a copy and accompanied by a theoretical body of analysis, *Mining Photographs* is not readily accessible.

photos NSCAD/UCCB Press



Top: Frontal view of the Dosco Miner showing the cutting jib, 1965. Below: Photo of shop worker illustrating the advantages of wearing shatterproof safety glasses, 1959.

"Nonetheless," Sekula insists, in concluding his essay, "this archive acknowledges the social character of work, despite the fact that Dosco wanted Shedden to celebrate its search for an automated coal mine. To modify Roland Barthes' remark that: 'It is hard to be done with a civilization of the hand', we might argue that it is hard to be done with a civilization of working people. The people of industrial Cape Breton have demonstrated this with their solidarity, their resilience, their strong sense of cultural community, and their willingness to struggle." But no tools are offered to

those workers depicted in the photographs, since they are now taken as the subject immanent to it: the sociality of the work. Sekula finishes: "The group photograph, then, harbours another meaning, a meaning that contradicts the logic of management. Here, posed confidently around the instruments and materials of production, are people who could quite reasonably control those instruments and materials. Therein lies a promise and a hope for the future." Sekula accounts for the miners what he denied them earlier: "in most of these photographs, miners are either absent, or are seen as mere 'appendages to the machine'." Sekula has to sidestep his own critique of photography in order to bring those depicted back into the picture of this new practice. But it is a contradictory gesture. In offering something to the working class, this materialist historian, in what amounts to an admission of failure, has to resort to the utopian. But if he has not offered tools, perhaps it is not utopian enough. What might photography mean to a class coming to identify with itself through action — beyond resistance, representation leading to action?

Contradictions arise in this attempt to link the archive to those depicted within the photographs. If class struggle takes place within images and through a "traffic in photographs", the problem here is that "struggle" is resumed within the archive as a site for activity. And the notion of activity has been displaced to the critic from the photographer and the subjects depicted. The problem with a discursive system, which is what the archive and its analysis become, is the relation of the "statements" to an outside. Standing between the archive and the outside, placed between actual subjects and their depictions, the intervening figure of the critic does not necessarily make an intervention. If the position from which the critic speaks is itself a position of representation (insofar as the critic stands to and for something) intervention then is a representational practice. In not being clear about this aspect of its practice, criticism fails to show how, at least, representation as an intervention might be active.

Philip Monk is an art critic who lives in Toronto.

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